“Jamaica is one of the most rebellious places on earth. Cause when the black people start rebelling, them rebel until them make them owna god. They just get up and say His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie is God. When Jamaicans do things, it different from everybody. The Jamaicans are a unique kinda people Out of reality, them work out them own reality.”

- Ossie Thomas, dance hall producer

-

Witness to Reggae

Beth Lesser

In Kingston, the air always felt damp – moist and hot and sticky. Trucks filled the downtown streets with diesel exhaust that mixed with the constant smell of burning trash. Trucks and buses zipped past with people hanging out the back and limbs dangling from every open space. The bus fumes were black and so thick they stuck to your eyelashes. Music blared. Every minibus had its own ghetto blaster, every car had its radio and stores put speakers out on the street to attract business. Twice a year, while others headed off to beach vacations on the coast, Dave and

I would hop on the Air Jamaica shuttle from Toronto, Canada to Kingston and hang out in the city core for two to three weeks on end, immersing ourselves in reggae.

My husband, Dave, and I had been putting together a photocopied Fanzine for reggae musician and producer Augustus Pablo. We had come to admire him for his recorded work at King Tubby's studio in Kingston, Jamaica. But a Zine comprised of news clippings and press releases hardly did justice to the dramatic, always changing story of reggae music. Only a true magazine had a chance, with in-depth articles, photos, interviews, news and a glossy full-color cover. We were well aware at the time that the current international reggae infrastructure couldn't support such an endeavor. There just wasn't enough mainstream interest to sell something relatively cost-intensive. But we were young (and naïve) and didn't care. Things would take care of themselves. And, anyway, the real purpose was to have an excuse to get closer to the music, to learn more, to experience reggae on a whole new level.

So we went to Kingston to try our luck. We sought out singers and deejays, producers, musicians- we even became close friends with one of the pressing plant employees who invited us back into the factory to watch the hot vinyl placed on the mold and stamped into shape as a brand new 45.

Trying to work on a project (like the magazine) in Jamaica turned out to be challenging – at least to our North American, urbanized, businesslike model of efficiency. Jamaica is thoroughly Caribbean, every aspect of life reflecting the slow pace of a location under siege by constant, unrelenting heat. The passage of time takes on a vague, amorphous quality in a place untouched by changes in seasons. Instead of, "I'll see you tomorrow at 2", Jamaican's singed off with "Later" or "Little more". And the ubiquitous, "Soon come" was seemed to us to exist only as a frustratingly useless substitute for concrete information.

Arranging interviews was a daily challenge. You might arrange with Michael Prophet to be at Youth Promotion on Saturday. When Saturday came, you would go down only to be told, "Oh he just left. But he said he would be here tomorrow." That always left us with a dilemma. Generally, we solved the problem by interviewing anyone who was actually right there at the time - and leaving the rest up to fate. If Michael Prophet were in town, he would most likely show up at a record shop or studio before long and we would run into him. If not, we would run into other people and talk to them.

Alternatively, we often had people approach us and say, "Norris is looking for you", or something to that effect, which left it up to us to guess where this person was so we could find out why we were being summoned. So Reggae Quarterly magazine was built on both purpose and serendipity, always allowing for the natural flow of events in time in the true Jamaican style.

The sheer density of artists living and working in the downtown core stacked the odds well in our favor of running into someone we were interested in talking to. And the pervasiveness of the music business meant it was impossible to step into any record store or even sit down in a corner restaurant downtown without running into someone involved in the reggae scene.

Starting with the photocopied fanzine in 1981, Dave and I spent the next ten years plus exploring every part of the reggae world. So far, I have written four books about the music but never mentioned our personal experiences abroad. To have a bit of fun, I decided to include a taste of what it was like to be in Jamaica collecting photos, interviews and records during the early 80s and the period of transition from the roots to the digital era.

1982

We were on the air Jamaica 'shuttle', the flight that went in a circle between Toronto, Kingston and Montego Bay. The pilot announced the landing and the stewardesses (as they were known) disappeared to the back of the plane. But as we gazed down looking for a city, all that met our eyes was a never-ending expanse of pitch-black darkness. It was already almost 9 PM. After a delay getting started and an unexpected stop in Montego Bay, we were finally nearing the Norman Manley Airport. But it looked like there was nothing there but the great expanse ocean. It was our first trip to Jamaica.

We did land. And the airport was there alright. But Kingston was in the midst of another of the regularly schedules blackouts that became a regular occurrence over the next decade. Sometimes they were planned and announced. (Several days into the vacation, the radio warned that the power would be off 5:30 – 11 the following day.) But often they were sudden and spontaneous, causing recording and pressing equipment to stop in mid-operation. The studios lost a lot of dub-cutting needles this way, not to mention the half-cut acetates that had to be thrown out.

We had booked a hotel in New Kingston that was recommended by Pete Weston - The Indies Housel, 5 Holborn road, a simple but perfectly adequate lodging, along a short street lined with hotels and discos. It was still dark when we checked into our hotel. Dave left to get something to eat. Outside, his first siting was a local prostitute strolling with a straight row of shiny gold teeth glowing in the moonlight.

The next morning, in the full light of day, we discovered the jerk chicken vendor, roasting his seasoned meet in what looked like an old oil barrel on the street by the hotel. Dave tried it and liked it and asked the cook how one made "jerk chicken." The vendor paused thoughtfully for a moment and then replied, smiling, "You take a chicken - and you jerk it!"
.Jamaica recovering from the 1980 election

The 1970s had been a tense and challenging time for everyone living in Jamaica. What started as Michael Manley's dream of a just and fair society became a nightmare of IMF imposed austerity measures and CIA interference.

By the time 1980 rolled around, the bank of Jamaica was limping along with minimal funds remaining in its coffers, the economy was in shambles and the ghetto streets were seething with unrest. Public sector workers walked off the job leaving three-quarters of the island without light and power

Politically motivated violence was erupting all over the island as the 1980 election approached. The stakes never felt higher. A toxic paranoia had seeped into society. Suspicion and distrust

were eating away at the remnants of nutual respect. The right-leaning groups lived in terror that if Manley won again, as soon as he took office, the Cuban army would sail into port and take over the government.

Meanwhile, the leftists were afraid of the same CIA interference that had toppled Allende in Chile in 1973. They feared that the IMF and World bank were poised, in the vent of a Seaga victory, to squeeze the life out of the Jamaican economy and replace it with US-based corporate slavery and exploitation of their natural resources. People were willing to fight to the death for their side.

The news reports were full of dramatic and tragic incidents. Manley's motorcade was shot at. The notorious Gold Street Massacres left four dead and 11 injured at a JLP dance. Armed attacks on PNP functions followed. The Eventide Home, which housed the poor and aged, was set on fire, and over 150 elderly female residents died. PNP candidate Ray McGann was shot and killed while campaigning in the JLP constituency of Gordontown. Gunmen attacked the Hannahtown police station….. The situation got so bad that when Michael Manley and PNP General Secretary D.K. Duncan were fired on at a PNP rally in Spanishtown, D.K. pulled out his .38 and returned fire, a scene that was caught on film and broadcast on national TV.

Altogether, according to the police, around 889 people lost their lives. By the time October 30, 1980 came, many former Manley had supporters switched their allegiance. Needless to say, Seaga triumphed winning 51 seats in Parliament, leaving the PNP with only 9. When the dust cleared there was a new Government pledged to revive the economy with the help of the US and the IMF. Jamaicans had placed their bets. The results of their decision would unfold over the next decade.

Although the worst of the infighting now ceased, the fear in people's minds couldn't be banished so easily. Traumatic memories still haunted people. Life returned to normal on the surface, but the streets and gullies contained too many reminders. Visible traces remained in view, like the bullet holes that marked the walls on Maxfield Ave. Around the corner from Channel One. People still only spoke of politics in hushed tones – unless they knew they were in safe territory. The scars were all too fresh. At least in the first few years of the 80s, the ghosts of the 70s still lingered.

Rockers International

The first time we went to Jamaica, in early 1982, we came bearing credentials from Cheer, a Caribbean music tip-sheet for Toronto radio jocks. Cheer listing new releases and charts for various West Indian genres. The editor of Cheer, Daniel Calderon, had introduced us to a friend of Augustus Pablo, Micko McKenzie. Daniel had been in touch with Pablo because of an issue with a local Toronto record producer who was pirating his products.

Micko made frequent stops in Toronto to visit his long-suffering wife who spent her days working hard and lamenting his absence. (She was hardly the only lonely spouse in Toronto. King Kong, Linval Thompson and selector Tupps, among others, also had Canadian wives while they lived abroad.) Micko Mackenzie was one of Pablo's right-hand men in Jamaica, a member of his small, select circle. We told Micko about our Live Good Today fanzine dedicated to

spreading awareness of Pablo's music, and he agreed to take us to see the boss when we came to Jamaica. Armed with a few errands and introductions from Daniel, and our photocopied fanzine, Live Good Today*, we set out to get acquainted with Kingston.

**Live Good Today was named after a Prince Jazzbo song from his LP by producer Lee Perry*

On our first trip, our focus was Orange Street and North Parade, where the majority of the record store were located. We were initially surprised by the accessibility and approachability of most artists. After living surrounded by the rock and roll milieu, where musicians were untouchable deities guarded by security, hustled into waiting limos after every show and secreted away into hotel suites, it seemed nothing short of miraculous to be able to walk down Chancery Lane and spot Leroy Smart on the steps of Winston Riley's record shop dancing and singing his latest hit, Chucky No Lucky.

The atmosphere was surprisingly relaxed, mellow and curiously egalitarian. The fact that an artist had enjoyed a few hits and maybe even toured abroad didn't mean he was on a pedestal the way celebrities are here. Artists belonged to and participated in the community they lived in as much as anyone else. And they were accessible to everyone. Junior Murvin might be sitting on the front porch at Tuff Gong, playing his guitar as people came and went. Big Youth could be found sitting in Skateland gambling with Lloyd Parks. Bingy Bunny was often found playing Pinball at the Parkview restaurant. Artists still maintained on meager salaries, lived in the ghetto and even when they did make out, they always came back to check on their bredren Very few ever forgot their roots.

The day after we arrived, we headed for the Rocker's International record shop at 135 Orange Street in downtown Kingston. Dave's first clue that we weren't in familiar territory anymore came when we climbed into a minibus for the ride from New Kingston to parade. The gentleman who takes the fares stretched out his hand to collect Dave's money and Dave noticed the bright red nail polish on his fingers. Little did we know what a trend it was in Kingston, especially in music circles where the likes of Junjo Lawes and Squingie sported sparkly, red pinkie nails.

Because we were staying in town, the minibus system was a pretty good way to get around. It could be fast and efficient if boarded at a major stop. In the 80s, the older public bus routes were divided into ten franchises and sold privately, creating a competitive system in which the buses now, rather than acting as a public service, acted as private routes. The drivers cold-bloodedly vied for the most passengers delivered in the shortest time, in the ambiance of their choosing. The usual background music was the latest sound system cassette or at least a collection of dancehall songs on tape. They drove fast, swerving in and out of traffic. When you wanted to get off, you just called out, "One stop, driver" and he would slide easily into the curb to let you off and pick up more passengers. Overcrowding, way beyond all safety considerations, was the norm. Therefore, so was pickpocketing and one had to ride with a hand over one's pocket or purse. The biggest challenge came at rush hour if you were waiting at one of the smaller stops along the way. Bus after bus would rush by, packed with school children in their uniforms, each vehicle too full to cram even one more child inside. You could wait for hours.

That's where a taxi came in handy. The taxis, none of which were in much better repair then the minibusses, were fast and relatively cheap, but you had to keep your eyes on where you were

going. One driver decided to take us on a long detour past Mountain View Avenue and back around into Kingston – and then tell us the fare was $100. (We had to explain that we had done the run from Half Way Tree to Parade dozens of times and the fare was $12 - the scenic route was of his choosing.)

Generally, taxis were considered the 'safer' of the two options, but at night it was often better to travel in a well-lit, well-occupied bus than be driving around the dark streets with a lone stranger.

Another contact Daniel gave us was his colleague T (Trevor) "Boots" Harris, a music journalist and publisher of an odd, local, small circulation magazine called Reggae-Vibrations. Boots an approaching middle-aged, slightly balding gentleman in suit pants and a tailored shirt, strode through Kingston with two dreads who would enter a store, announce his imminent arrival and then block the exits so no one could escape. Then Boots would come bounding in a broad smile and a flurry of activity. He would wrap up his business quickly and then dash to the car, his two dreads following at his heals.

Always enthusiastic and cheerful, he had great plans for our little "book" and gave us all kinds of advice – to take it to Sangster's books shop, to speak with a certain publisher or distributor. But none of the ideas ever panned out.

Not for lack of trying. We went to the business area of downtown Kingston and bravely entered Sangster's main branch. But, the moment we wandered into the clean, air-conditioned premises, I felt my stomach sink. They had no interest in a homemade fanzine about a Rasta musician, much less a color magazine about dancehall. We fared no better with the distributor (whose name I can't recall). It was going to be grass roots all the way. We were not going to expect, or ever receive help from any established outlet or publisher. Out sales were going to come from record distributors and outlets.

From time to time, Boots would show up and disappear like a whirlwind, always with brilliant new ideas we knew were doomed to failure.

Boots spent his life working in Jamaican media and passed away in 2014.

Orange Street

For years, Orange Street had been Kingston's official "music street.". Dotted with record shops and rented recording facilities, Orange Street was a magnet for music. On weekends, sounds like Tom the Great Sebastian would play. The legendary Prince Buster was born and raised on Orange Street. That's why he built his Record Shack there. Bunny Lee used studio space at #101, just below Beeston Street. Sir J.J. was at #133. Clancy Eccles, Beverly's Music and Lynn's record shop were here. At the bottom, Sonia Pottinger had her pressing plant and wholesale outlet.

The '70s saw an exodus from the area as political tensions rose. The neighborhood was close to Mathews Lane, home of the Spanglers, a gang with political affiliations. By 1980, only Prince Buster and Sonia Pottiner were left standing, as well as Gregory Isaac's Cash and Carry outlet, run by Leggo Beast (Trevor Douglas). Cash and Carry continued to distribute Gregory's work and the recordings of other artists like Bunny Wailer, but Gregory, himself, hung out at the African Museum shop on Chancery Lane, just off Parade.

Although Jamaica had elected a new Prime Minister, with a more open attitude to foreign investment, downtown Kingston still looked and felt like it did in the troubled '70s. Political borders were still radioactive. The war was over; the JLP had won this round. But the wounds were still raw, and people were still afraid. Downtown Kingston was suffering. The neighborhoods were small and highly politicized as a way of survival in a country where the government was ineffective in solving people's economic and security problems. People relied on community leaders who, in turn, relied on their connections to politicians to get things done. But politics ultimately meant violence, and certain Rastafarian groups in the city core were seeking alternative solutions.

In the Rockers Store

When we first arrived at the Rockers International shop, Garth, Pablo's (''bal' headed'', or non-rasta) brother, was behind the long counter playing roots music with some popular tunes mixed in (like anything by Gregory Isaacs at the time). The store was long and very narrow with a speaker out front to promote the music. Guishe, one of Pablo's trusted aides, was in and out, as were artists Delroy Williams, a truly meek and humble soul, Norris Reid, a friendly, open but ultimately restless youth, and Jah Bull, large and slow and often somewhat morose. Pablo was often elsewhere in Kingston, busy with the banking or with his accountant, or he was out in the country trying to shore up his failing health.

Tetrack

Our first glimpse of Kingston was a tour around the city with Pablo's only recording Group Tetrack. The nighttime drive took us around their home area of Rockfort and Mountain View Ave and back into Kingston, passing Skateland where Virgo was playing. They stopped the car outside for a moment so we could feel the pounding bass and hear the echoing music in the semi-darkness of the city after sunset. The effect was mesmerizing. Sound systems were something larger than life, something with immense power, so unknown to us, but so much a part of Jamaican culture. The magic of sound systems became a guiding force for us as we explored reggae.

Pablo

Pablo, himself, was serious and never appeared to be happy or relaxed. It took a few years before he would let me take a photo (and that had to be with his artists, not alone) or grant us an interview. His suspicion of foreigners was so deep. Miko, on the other hand, was playful and impulsive. He would sit with us on the hotel patio, talking about how he would like to hunt wild boar with a bow and arrow. Guishe was always dapper and well dressed in a downtown style, with a tweed cap and tailored pants. In the early 80s, there weren't many customers. Pablo was more concerned with recording his artists and getting the records distributed properly, a challenge in this unregulated business in which every man was out for his own, or so it seemed to the artists trying to get a fair deal. You couldn't be too careful. The rip-offs were inevitable. The challenge was to keep recovering and persevering. In those days, it was common for

producers and record companies to cheat a bit – or a lot- on sales and royalties. The pressing plant might cheat the producer by pressing more records than the paperwork indicated. The producer might cheat the singer by selling the rights to release the music to another company abroad without the singer's knowledge. Along this chain of events that involved getting a piece of music from studio to market, there were a thousand opportunities to take advantage of the singer's inability to track his product independently

The worst of the economic and social turmoil in the 70s fell on the folks who lived in the ghettos. In response, as a survival tactic, youth were settling up collectives – organizations that ran small local businesses independently as a way of giving employment to young people and attracting revenue to the area. All the earnings were shared and reinvested to help the business expand. Several artists were finding this the only alternative to the exploitation they felt they experienced working for the established record companies on the island. Encouraged by Michael Manley's call to 'self-reliance'*, artists like Big Youth, Gregory Isaacs, Sugar Minott and Augustus Pablo began looking at creating their own record labels

**Prime minister from 1972 – 1980 and 1989- 1992, Michael Manley advocated 'self-reliance' both on a community and national scale. He wanted to make Jamaica less dependent on foreign economies as well as more confident of its own culture faced with the substantial lingering remnants of its colonial past. On the community level, 'Manley encouraged local cooperatives to share in the work of building what the community needed. He defined a cooperative as an organization owned by its members, where all work for the common good and all share equally.*

In the mid-70s, Pablo's realized his dream of setting up an artist's collective. The idea was to use the proceeds from the record store and his own record sales to develop new artists, allowing more youth from the ghetto a chance to build something productive for themselves. "We just try to work in unity," He explained at the time. "Everything I learn, within the crooked ways of Babylon and producers, I try to guide the artists them now from that way. It might be slow, but it more sure than most other ways. And when it go through, it will work the right way."

He now had the Rockers International store and distribution business running, his record labels, as well as his own career recording. For his Rockers International record label. Pablo continued to train and develop young talent. The initial funding had come from his first independently released LP, King Tubby Meets Rockers Uptown. But even that came only after first losing it in an incident in which the company selling record never reimbursed him, he claimed, so he had to 'pirate' his own LP and sell it himself. "I did give my LP to some producers but them never give me no money, you know. So I take the jacket and just kinda pirate it myself. I have the rights to it so it not really 'pirate', but, true, I never had no negative for the jacket so I just had to take the jacket and I release it and give it to a company and that's the first money I get and from that money I start producing."

Singers Ricky Grant and Delroy Williams had already been involved with the nearby Mathews Lane Youth movement, another community collective that helped residents organize and maintain small businesses. At the time, a dry cleaning business and a shoemaking shop were operating. Delroy Williams, one of the young roots singers Pablo was working with at the time, took us to an I-tal restaurant on Mathews Lane that was part of this community-based initiative. While we were eating our vegetables over rice and peas (with no salt used in the cooking), some very unfriendly faces peeked around the corner, eyeing us with a piercing intensity. Delroy brushed them off. "Just cool, now", he told them carefully and firmly. We finished and walked

back to the shop. But it was a reminder of how unsettled the city still was, and how close the threat of violence remained to everyone living in the poor areas of downtown Kingston.

Suspicions of Foreigners

Not many foreigners were walking the streets of Kingston in the early 1980s. The only other white people we used to see regularly were the omnipresent Latter Day Saints missionaries dressed in their dark suits in the searing heat. But as we were dressed casually, we clearly weren't Mormons. Genuinely puzzled by our presence, people sometimes asked us, sincerely, if we were CIA.

The world we walked into back then was still isolated and insular - and very divided along post-colonial class lines. The elite from up in the hills and the poor in the ghettos below didn't mix much. We were clearly out of place and, I think, the inability of people to peg us down, at times, inspired suspicion.

Even into the 80s, this distrust sometimes made getting an interview challenging. Suspecting an ulterior motive, the artist, or people around him or her, would pepper us with questions designed to challenge our 'spiritual readiness' to 'reason' with the artist, all the while probing underneath for any hint of a profit motive.

Often, when we would find an eager young artist and get to talking, someone would come running over claiming to be the artist's manager. This newcomer would step in to give us the 3rd degree. "Does the I have Jah in the I heart? What is the I's motivation toward the Most High Jah Rastafar I who liveth for-I-ever? Does the I accept Rastafari as the true and living God?" Gradually, the conversation would come around to money. Were we going to pay for an interview? The assumption was that we had a financial stake in getting one. Why else would we be there on North Parade, or on Orange Street, or anywhere in hot, noisy, dirty downtown Kingston unless there were some gain for us in it.

Even Augustus Pablo distrusted us at first, although we arrived with credentials from reliable sources, like Daniel Calderon of Cheer Magazine, whom he had dealt with, and his Rockers Intl. team member Miko McKenzie, whom we had spoken within Toronto. He explained once, "I see one and one {meaning other people in general} trying to use I and I to gain the popularity of Jah children and they don't really mean us any good." As though journalists (including us, I assumed) were using his fame to gain credibility with other artists and some purchasing public out there.

For over a year, he wouldn't allow me to photograph or interview him – only his artists. In fact, several artists we met wouldn't allow me to take photos. Linval Thompson, for example, only allowed me to photograph him once, and only then with a group of friends. Decades later he asked me for old photos and I had to explain that, at the time, he had refused to let me take any. *

**Photos: Whenever I got back to Canada and had the rolls of film developed, I would order a second copy of each. Before returning to Jamaica, I would arrange the snapshots into little packets, one for each person. In Kingston, I would carry the packets around, handing each person his or her packet when we ran into each other.*

By the same token, you could suddenly find yourself in charge of a record label abroad. Jamaican artists and producers were quick to confer titles and authority on anyone from another country in the faint hope that by planting enough seeds, something would take roots and grow. Jazzbo used to tell us that Dave was "CEO" of Ujama abroad. Once when we were in Youth Promotion's yard, we overheard a lone British visitor chatting with Documents, one of the people involved with the paperwork side of YP. Within 5 minutes, Documents had handed the foreign gentleman control over Youth Promotion in the UK. Stunned, the man pleaded for 7 days grace period to think it over and decide. But things work that way in reggae.

Foreigners were useful in other ways, as well. Foreigners, like us, were an invaluable link to the outside world. Jah Bull kept in touch with us regularly while we were back in Toronto. "You see, I am respected by a whole lot of youth down here in Jamaica," He would write to us. "But in Jamaica, if you don't have a money to give a man, 'im don't even see you. So I am asking you to boost my status. Right now I want football boots and a tracksuit….the number I wear is 9 ½. The color of the suit is blue." He even mailed us, followed the time-honored Jamaican tradition, a cut-out paper outline of his foot so we could get him the right fit.

Sonia Pottinger

By this time, Sonia Pottinger had moved from her Disk Pressers pressing plant at # 37 Orange Street. The first time we went in, a crestfallen Joseph hill was loitering about. He and Miss P had just finished a discussion about royalties and I guess he got the worst of it.

Although Miss P was polite, we immediately caught her vibe. Regarded as a great music producer and a tough, determined lady, Miss Pottinger had little patience with small talk. She was distinctly unimpressed by our visit and spent it complaining about everything from the newly hatched reggae record companies in the US to dreads in the music business (something she loathed) and upstart record producers at home (she thought musicians should "learn to talk" before they start producing).

She was busy at the time getting ready to sue Heartbeat records in the U.S. In 1983, Heartbeat cleverly released a live session dancehall album, Dee-Jay Explosion Inna Dancehall Style. Borrowing from the idea of dance cassettes, the company recorded a live session with Gemini in Skateland featuring the top dancehall artists of the day toasting and singing over popular rhythm tracks and released it as a 12" album. But they forgot to pay royalties on the rhythm tracks, several of which were owned by Pottinger, like Shank I Sheck and Baba Boom. The album was the first true cross over of true dancehall culture to U.S. audiences.

She freely admitted, with a sinister chuckle, that she was "mean'. When we returned a week or two later, she greeted us with a frown. "Oh. it's you", she remarked dryly, adding with a touch of

disdain, “I thought you had left already.” She had no interest in doing an interview or contributing any product to Dave’s radio show. Disappointed, we never went back.

Along Orange Street, at 125, just a few doors down from Prince Buster’s shop was Cash and Carry, the record distributing outlet. When we first dropped in, we were surprised that owner Trevor “Leggo Beast” Douglas wasn’t playing records at all – he was playing dance cassettes! Because that’s what he liked the listen to. Dance cassette fever had already penetrated deep into the Jamaican music culture. Black cassettes were as valuable as US currency. Tapes and batteries could get you anything. (Of course, if you had blank acetates for making dub-plates, those were worth gold)

We dropped off a blank Fuji 90 minutes cassette for Leggo to fill for us. I can’t recall what he was charging – it wasn’t much in any case. But he had fresh, new Jah Love cassettes with Brigadier Jerry and current Jah Ruby tapes with Bobby Culture – his two favorite deejays at the time. With that acquisition, we were hooked. We began to team up and trade with other local collectors back home in Toronto. And whenever we came to Jamaica, we brought boxes of sealed cassettes and asked everyone we met to fill one or two, especially selectors like Danny Dread (Volcano, Stur-Mars) and Inspector Willie (Stur-Gav). In exchange, we would donate a couple of blanks or some other scarce but highly coveted item.

Other records stores also provided dance tapes to the public. We got a Stereograph (later called Stur-Gav) and a Killimanjaro tape from Gregory Isaacs’ bother, Errol, in the African Museum shop. It did seem strange at the time; the spread of cassettes was eating into record sales quite badly already. But, Jamaicans saw dance cassettes as another way to make money. It was cheaper to buy a full 90-minute cassette than 90 minutes’ worth of 45s and the tapes featured the best music, all the dancehall favorites.

Everywhere you went, people had dance tapes. Instead of the radio playing in public places, dance cassettes would come booming out of buses and cars, stores and restaurants. The sound systems would record their own live dances, usually capturing the peak 90 minutes, a portion of the dancer later in the night when the ‘prentos’ (apprentices) had finished the pros were all warmed up and flying. The next day, the recordings would be disseminated amongst the fans, passed from hand to hand, copied on countless dubbing decks until, by the 5th or 6th generation, the quality was completely degraded. These cassettes would also be sent overseas to expats who liked to keep up to date with the styles in their native ‘Jam-down’.
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Most people were pretty accommodating and willing to share. But some guarded their special cassettes like the valuable resource they had come to be. Tapes direct ‘from the board’ (first generation) were the most valuable and the value decreased with each generation away from the primary source. Some sounds gave them out readily – good free publicity. But others kept them entirely private, only available to a small elite. So, certain cassettes now also held a prestige value above their simple value as entertainment. And, a cassette from a popular sound was more valuable than one from a washed-up ‘old pan’ sound or a newcomer who hadn’t hit the top rank yet.

This cassette phenomenon was the inspiration for the article in the first issue of RQ, "Why Cassettes Tapes is a Must" introducing our friend and mentor in tape collecting, Paul Bennett. Dance cassettes was a subject I had never seen addressed in print, yet it was the most potent underground force driving the creation of new music in reggae. The 1980s was the start of the prominent position dancehall would hold as the international face of reggae. Dancehall had always been the driver of the music, but remained hidden, in the background, not presented to the public. Only the finished recordings and live concerts with bands were public. Dancehalls were considered too 'ghetto' to go public in Jamaica, let alone 'cross over' to foreign fans - especially at a time when the colonial mentality was still dominant in the media. Radio and TV still looked to Europe and North America to model its local standards. The radio was still blithely playing country and western and US pop. The Sunday morning airwaves were reserved for the word of the Lord. No reggae. Not even soul

Going back at the end of our stay, we arranged with Pablo to send us some albums to sell – Ricky Grant's Poverty People and Delroy William's I Stand Black. In the future, we would often return to Canada with a few boxes of LPs or 45s. Sometimes we just wanted to help someone out, but there were times when we believed that a particular song was a hit and we wanted to prove it.

The trip back to Toronto usually stopped first at Montego Bay to pick up vacationers before heading back to Toronto with a full load. In the Sangster Airport, the empty plane would quickly fill as a stampede of merry Canadian tourists burst aboard, hair in tatty braids fraying at the ends after a week in the sun and wind, still dressed in t-shirts and shorts, hauling straw baskets from the market filled with snacks for the kids on the 4-hour flight back to the cold.

In the Toronto airport, there was always someone who custom's officers would pull aside. We would get a taxi home through the snow, shivering, with our suitcases full of 45s in the trunk. The rolls of film would go to the shop the next day to be processed, and I would start transcribing the interviews for our new venture,

Reggae Quarterly Magazine. #1   1982

The premier issue of RQ contained a mix of Augustus Pablo's artists, local Toronto talent, and a few of the popular Jamaican artists who passed through Toronto for dances or stage shows. Number 1 was the only issue that included photographs by other people. On our first trip, I didn't have a camera, so we borrowed a tiny Instamatic type camera from Dave's mother and took turns taking shots with it.

At the time, I was still mentally locked in print journalism, which was my first career choice before I started photography. Thus far, I had taken two basic photography courses in college that mainly covered black and white processing and printing, but I still saw myself as a writer. A journalist tells the story and fills in the visuals from other sources. So, for the first issue of RQ, we used four images donated by Pablo associate Lloyd Goldbourne, aka Teacher.

But I began to realize how much I had missed not having a good camera. The visual impact of Jamaica needed to be recorded. The dance invitation posters, rickety old buses, the tin roof shacks, the crowds, the goats in the street, the “higglers”, all caught up in a swirl of dust and heat. And he artists lining the downtown street alleys.

A year later, I picked up an old SLR camera and brought it along on our next trip. But having been taught in school that ‘real’ photographers (professionals) took black and white film or color transparencies, that's what I did. Color film (which had only been in mainstream use for 20 years) was considered ‘commercial’, something for family snapshots, birthday parties, graduations. Of course, my slides were always underexposed as transparencies had a very narrow range of tolerance for lighting conditions. I felt like a failure, or at least like a rank amateur. Photography wasn’t my strength. I also never mastered the complexity of flash lighting. I survived all my visits to Jamaica using a tiny fill flash, which I used outdoors and in. Outdoors it was necessary to battle the sharp shadows produced by the strong sun.

For the second trip, I went to Jamaica equipped to shoot black and white, along with a few rolls of slide film. But when we returned, and I brought people copies of the photos, I was met with looks of total confusion. Why aren't these photos in color? People had uniformly expected color snapshots and were mystified that I would bother taking, let along give them, a black and white image. I felt terrible – and torn. The official line that color images were not ‘art’, or the preferences of the people we were meeting and getting to know?

I resolved the conflict by going with color film. Knowing I could always print the color as black and white but not the other way around, on the following journey, I brought only color film – Fuji 400 for its versatility and affordability. So the color shots (other than the slides) started sometime in 1983.

The first issue of RQ was also different in being the only issue that was put together by someone else. A character who called himself Joe Acme, from Acme Printing, did the layout and printing, but I wasn't pleased with the result. From then on, to save money, we had the columns of type made at the Buy and Sell Newspaper, and I then used their space to paste the columns of type and the photos onto the boards for printing. I had to estimate the number of words I could fit into each column in order to leave space for photos. Then, I sized the photos as a percentage of their original size to fit into the spaces between columns of type. It involved a lot of math, adjusting and re-adjusting figures until everything fit on the page just right

I had no idea what I was doing design-wise. At one point, I remember discovering the black border tapes that came in different widths, and I went a bit crazy with them. Generally, my aim for each issue was the most information on each page to keep the page count down. Therefore, the weight below the post office threshold for higher mailing costs. We had so little advertising, that wasn't hard to do.

And so we made the first issue of Reggae Quarterly which, despite clearly being a magazine, was referred to, henceforth, by all Jamaicans, as "the book" - as in "Can I have a copy of the book?" or "When are you going to put me in the book?"

When the magazines were printed, I would package up the orders and carry the packages to the post office to send out. After a couple of issues, it became apparent that we were not business people. We had started the magazine with no plan whatsoever, other than to create a magazine and see what happened. I had a vague idea in mind that I think came from having read too many Tiger Beat and 16 Magazines as a pre-teen.

But, of course, we had no idea how to promote the magazine, who the audience would be, how to find distributors, or how to sell ads for it. Most of the little advertising space there was ended up being given away to friends or traded for records for interviews. I didn't have sales or circulation figures and couldn't even recall how many of each issue we had printed. Places like Dub Vendor in the UK saved us by handling a good number of each issue and paying without complaint. Usually, we had to leave the magazine in stores in NY and Toronto on consignment and then try to collect when no magazines were left on the shelves – which was always a problem.

Getting paid from any Jamaican record store, even the most efficient where accounts were actually kept, was always an uphill battle. There was always a story – I don't have cash right now, I have to go and see if they sold (Maybe we just put them away somewhere, the store was broken into last night, I have to check with (insert name). He keeps track of this counter…..

Once I went to Alfred Abrahams store to collect some money he owed me for the Reggae Quarterlies I had left on consignment. But I just got the usual runaround. The store was far from our apartment, and I was getting frustrated. So I stood in the doorway as he was trying to leave, giving him the choice of having to push me out of the way or find some money. He did somehow manage to come up with the cash, and we remained on good terms. This sort of issue was never taken on a personal level.

At the time, the magazine was not taken seriously by anyone (but us and a handful of reggae fans who had not abandoned the field when Bob Marley died and took roots music with him). That's why there are still copies in my basement.

Chapter 2 1983 Morant Bay

The second time we came to Jamaica, we stayed with the family of a friend who lived out in Morant Bay, a small town on the southern coast of the island, east of the capitol. It was to be the one and only time we came close to a body of water in our years of traveling.

At Paul's house, sure, they liked reggae, but Michael Jackson ruled. Paul's brother Neil was big on Neil Diamond, and Henry, Paul's stepfather, would listen to Charlie Pride cassettes, from sunrise long into the night, as he tooled around with his truck in the front yard, the CB radio crackling away. Everyone did agree on one thing - Louis Armstrong was the don of all music. The town had a tiny, pebbled beach dotted with sea urchins, and we did go for one brief swim after accompanying our friend's family to church on a sleepy Sunday when everything was closed and there was no point in going into Kingston, which was still on a colonial schedule of closing down on Sundays and on Wednesday afternoons The rest of the days, we woke up early and took the hair-raising minibus ride along the narrow mountain roads, barreling around sharp

curves bordered by steep drop-offs, the driver blasting the latest dance cassettes all the way. The last stop was at Parade, which served as a terminal for many city routes. With Chancery Lane right around the corner, it was a good place to start.

Chancery Lane

Studio 17 was no longer in operation, but Chancery Lane, AKA "Idlers Rest," was still the center of Kingston's music scene. During the '70s, the narrow street was like a holding area where artists and musicians would wait, hoping to be called into Studio 17* to work. Gregory Isaac's record shop, African Museum, was close to the corner, and Winston Riley's was just up the lane followed by Petal's bar even farther up.

**Studio 17 was upstairs from Randy's Record Shop and had also been owned by the Chin's. Inside Randy's some of the greatest reggae recordings had been made.*

For artists, musicians, producers, it was standard operation to pass by at some point during the day to see what was up. Two major record retail outlets were around the corner on North Parade, Randy's, and Joe Gibbs. Artists, making the rounds of record stores to collect royalties or check on sales, would stop by the lane to smoke a spliff and 'reason' with their musical bredren, run a joke or two and catch up on the latest news.

The Parkview restaurant on North Parade was a good place to get a quick lunch or a box juice for the road. Being a vegetarian, I existed on bun and cheese, bulla and the rare I-tal patty, all washed down with a peanut punch or some drink containing Irish Moss. We rarely ate in restaurants as we were on a tight budget, but having a snack at the Parkview didn't break the bank, and it was a good place to spot musicians.

A somewhat disheveled Winston Jarrett was usually on the scene with friend Jah Lloyd (Jah Lion), both in an upbeat mood and happy to chat. Back around the corner on Chancery Lane, Prince Far-I might come along to pass out invitations to a dance he was holding that weekend. Delroy Wilson would arrive at Winston Riley's Record Shack to return a stack of recently read comic books, dusting them off with his sleeve and flattening them as he laid them down on Riley's cluttered desk. Older, well-established artists like Stranger Cole would stop by as would the not-yet-known like Echo Minott. The reggae world seemed to revolve around this tiny laneway.

With the abundance and availability of artists, one would think it would be easy to get interviews for the magazine. But things rarely go as planned in Jamaica**.** You might arrange with Michael Prophet to be at Youth Promotion on Saturday. And, when Saturday came, you would go down only to be told, "Oh, he just left. But he said he would be here tomorrow." That always left us with a dilemma. Should we return the next day (and if so, at what time) or just interview whoever was present and ready to talk. And if no one was available, just wandering on to the next place –studio or store- to see who we might run into.

Alternatively, we often had people approach us and say, "Norris is looking for you", or something to that effect, which left it up to us to guess where he might be and why we were

being summoned. So Reggae Quarterly magazine was built on both purpose and serendipity, always allowing for the natural flow of time and events in the Jamaican style.

Chancery Lane was pretty laid back - the perfect place to chat with musicians. That is, all except for the interruptions by persistent and ubiquitous begging. Anyone who walked through Chancery Lane was fair game. No one was immune - tourist, artist, producer, whomever. The supplicant, likewise, could be anyone. One afternoon, drummer Leroy "Horsemouth" Wallace was trying to sell a portable tape deck for $500 to get some dubplates to take to England on the tour he was doing backing deejay Tappazuckie. When we declined the offer, he begged us some money to buy gas for his motorcycle. Dave laughed and asked him how a big movie star like him could be asking for money. "We should be asking you", he joked.

Horsemouth had played the protagonist in the independent movie Rockers just a few years earlier. Clearly, he wasn't living the Hollywood life. In fact, he asked us for money again in 1986 when we ran into him at Half Way Tree. Although Dave had been teasing Horsemouth, the reality was that reggae didn't offer much financial support. Even the most well-known artists led relatively modest lifestyles in those days, and many were outright poor. Only the very well established artists could claim a residence up in the hills, high above the ghettos of downtown Kingston, people like Bunnie Lee or Robbie Shakespeare. But even they had paid their dues. All those songs of sufferation and want reflected the day to day life of so many artists.
The royalty for a bestselling 45 might be 10 cents. And for performing live all night at a dance, the top deejay might earn a few hundred dollars – the top deejays, that is. Many crew members weren't paid at all. They went along for the promise of a free meal, a couple of beers, and a good time.

So it was not surprising that we often entertained visitors at the hotel who felt that anything we had two of, could be shared with them at no great loss to ourselves. The first time Squingey dropped by, he was so overjoyed to see two packs of cigarettes, he picked up both, and then took a cassette. We asked him to put the items down. He settled for a couple of beers but ended up with the cassette anyway at the end of the evening. Even Bread from the Wailing Souls stepped into the room and immediately helped himself to two cigarettes to build a spliff and then asked for the lighter. T Dread, friend and longtime associate of musicians and especially Volcano sound, asked me for my gold chain because, according to him, "girls are supposed to give you those things".

Friends were the same. Chiney left with two lighters. Tonic used to come up to our hotel to ask for bus fare to go to work, Fields, a local friend, would drop by when he wanted gas money for his bike. Of course, nothing was being stolen. Everything was asked for openly - and most requests were easy to comply with. What was difficult was the constant barrage. We had to set forth from the hotel in the morning with extra lighters, pens, batteries, cassettes, packs of cigarettes if we intended to come home with any left in our pockets.

The poverty and suffering were all around, on every street corner and behind every zinc fence. One of the children living in the yard next door to the hotel would come when we are out and tell Clover, the sole employee of the hotel, that I promised her lunch money and Clover must give it to her. Her mother was alone with five children, so the oldest son had to help out, so he got her

some peanuts to sell at the bus stop. When the girl's only pair of sandals broke, she could no longer go to school as she had nothing to cover her feet.

We got into the habit of taking an extra suitcase with us. On the way down, it contained giveaways and, on the way back, records. There were general items that were in high demand, like nail clippers, pens, batteries, rechargers, VHS movies, tapes, hats (and tams), razors, shoe polish, cigarettes, hair clips, and toys. We also got special requests including a mesh 'ganzie', LPs on a cassette, a leather bag, headphones, a photo scrapbook, a calculator, a doll, a sweatshirt, a Kangol hat, iron pills, pears, and a Canadian $5 bill.

On the other hand, Jamaicans were very generous to us. Jamaicans were always ready to reciprocate if the tables were turned. Once an artist asked Dave for $20. When Dave replied, "Sorry, I'm broke", the concerned artist assured him that he could get him some money shortly to help him out.

More than once, Jamaicans came to our rescue. When my camera broke during an early trip, King Jammy lent me his for the entire two weeks. When I had bronchitis, one of the Youth Promotion crew went to the country to bring back a special herb that would open up my lungs. When Dave and I got married at Youth Promotion, we were brought bottles of rum and apple wine for the party. There were so many instances of kindnesses. I came to understand that in Jamaica, the rule is that whoever has, gives. That's the safest way to live because one day it will be someone else's turn to have. And you will be asking. So sharing in the present is your best guarantee for the future. And the only security available in the ghetto.

King Tubby

When we arrived at the Rockers store one morning, we got a message from Garth (Pablo's brother who usually minded the shop) that Delroy Williams was coming to carry us somewhere. We waited until Delroy came in a taxi to take us out to Drumaly Ave, home and studio of King Tubby. Pablo was already there waiting for us. He was in the studio with his one deejay, Jah Bull, who was set to voice some tunes that day. Pablo was trying to build some publicity for him, so he called us in.

Unlike other studios, like Channel One, nobody was hanging around at Tubby's. For one thing, people were still afraid of the area, a border region that saw a lot of political violence in the 70s. As well, it was off the main roads, in a residential area, so it didn't attract the same number if idlers.

Although safer since the change of government, the mood around that part of St Andrews was still somber. Once, Ray I walked us there from Jammy's studio, which meant crossing a political border. As we walked, faces would peer at us from the yards we passed and angry-looking young men would hover a little closer as we walked along the road. I believe it was on Pennwood that two plainclothes Eradication Squad* members holding semi-automatic weapons popped out of an unmarked car and stopped us, Ray I flung his hands in the air instantly. But, after a few brief, tense questions, they let us continue on our way.

**Eradication Squad: The government of Edward Seaga formed the Operations Squad to locate illegal weapons in the community. Commonly known as the "eradication squad", they became the subject of many song lyrics for their brutal tactics in the ghetto where they would break into houses without a warrant or shoot down suspects in the street*

Tubby welcomed us graciously. Polite and gentlemanly, Tubby was not a small talk person. Whereas many Jamaicans in the music business loved to boast, to 'big up' themselves and make exaggerated claims of their fame and fortune, Tubby loved the technical side of music creation, and he had an intimate connection with electronics.

Dave sat in on the recording session with Jah Bull and watched the King in action while I wandered around, taking photos of Tubby's various employees working in other parts of the studio. At the end of our visit, Tubby reluctantly agreed to a couple of photos in his den I couldn't believe he really did have a (cardboard) crown lying around that he put on for photos. He gave us his official King Tubby's Studio calendars (the one with Jesus not the one with the naked lady.)

We went back a few years later when Tubby was building a new state of the art studio in the same location. Only the shell was nearing completion. Tubby was friendly and relaxed, happy to show us around, and very proud of his new endeavor, with great hopes for the future. But it wasn't to be. The studio was never completed. Tubby was shot and killed outside his home in 1989.

Dances

The practice of foreigners attending dances was still dicey in the early 80s, so we relied on local friends to tell us which sound systems and venues would be OK to visit and under which conditions. The first rule was – no chains. Don't wear any jewelry. For women, carry your purse in front (to ward off pickpockets). We were told Gemini was a good sound to start with, especially sessions at their official venue, the Gemini Club. There was good security, and Gemini "carried the most girls," which made the atmosphere a little less volatile. But bringing a camera was not recommended.

Potentially losing a camera wasn't a risk I was prepared to take. So the camera came with me only to Skateland, Youth Promotion, Jammy and Skeng Don's dances, but not to dances where I didn't know the sound and the promoters. I missed a lot of great opportunities, but I kept the one camera I had safe.

In the early '80s, dances were still frequently interrupted by the police or broken up because of misbehaving in the audience (like two girls fighting). The atmosphere was more relaxed than it had been in the 70s, and many dances went off without a hitch, especially at the big, official venues like The Gemini Club, The House of Leo or Skateland. Some of the local, neighborhood dances weren't so well secured. Yet even in the big venues, things happened. The police broke up Jammy's official opening night clash with Black Scorpio. Why? Someone said a man with a gun, who was running away from the police, had run in there. At least according to the police. But they used that excuse a lot.

Sometimes it was the police in the dance itself causing the problem. One well attended and relatively tranquil Gemini dance was terminated abruptly at 1 a.m. by the police officer, Trinity, and his men firing shots into the air.

Police and soldiers often came to the dances with their arms loaded and spent the evening engaged in enthusiastic 'gun salutes', shooting off rounds in response to the music. The crowd would go wild for the sound of rapid shots in the air over their heads. But nothing to be alarmed about. People assured us that a Gemini dance was safe because "only security shoots up Gemini."

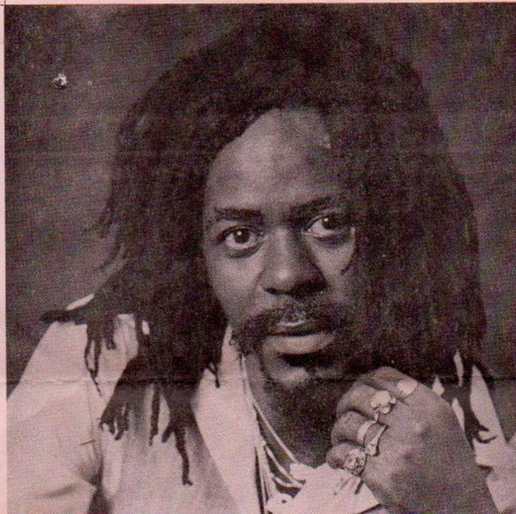
The very first dance we ever went to was in Toronto. Lui Lepke was coming to some out-of-the-way converted hall on the second floor of an old building. At the time, I was a big fan of his current hit, Can't Take Me Landlord, so I was eager to see Lepke in person. Knowing nothing about dances at the time, we went way too early- maybe around 9- and the place was completely empty. Lui Lepke appeared sometime after midnight. But it gave us time to chat with the promoter Desmond Levine who turned out to be Linval Thompson's brother-in-law (Linval was married to Desmond's sister, Hortense), and we become good friends.
Once midnight arrived and the crowds began coming in, Lui Lepke appeared - not on a stage - but on the dance floor with just a microphone in hand –and all the girls were dancing around him. He mashed up the place. And we continued to go to dances.

Hey! Come nice it up

with

LOUIS LEPKIE

Direct from yard



with

STAMA RANKIN

WEEZLE THE OPERATOR

Plus

PAPA MELODY THE HIGH POWER

THIS SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 1981

HAGERMAN HALL, 12 HAGERMAN ST.

Bay and Dundas

Top Security *Love & Unity*

Printed by GOLDING'S GRAPHIC CENTRE—357 Oakwood Ave.—656-4968

Although often marred by gun violence, dances were popular, and Toronto had a healthy dance scene in the 80s with a good number of local sounds playing regularly. Leroy Sibbles had Papa Melody and frequently brought up artists to perform, like Ringo and Ranking Joe.

JINGLES
Invites you to his
BIRTHDAY & CUSTOMER APPRECIATION DAY
(DOUBLE HEADER)
on Sunday 25th January 1987
at: SKATELAND ROLLER DISCO
Half Way Tree
Music By: GEMINI DISCO
Adm: Free LIVE VIDEO TAPING
Variety of food on the house
Dress: Very Slick 87 Style

The first dance we went to in Jamaica was Gemini Sound in Skateland. You couldn't get much safer. Skateland was a roller skating venue, so it was large and stocked with security. The well-connected owner. Jingles, entertained politicians and entertainers in his office on the premise with Johnny Walker Black. He was a staunch socialist and had run for office unsuccessfully several times, filling in his time with music in between. Jingles was tall, genial and easy going to a point, and then intensely serious. But he always welcomed us when we came by, and I felt safe enough to carry my camera and get some shots of Ringo, Welton Irie, and Squiddley at the height of the slackness* mania. The crowd was going wild. Especially the girls.

**Slackness referred to the use of sexually explicit lyric in songs. Although at first, in the '50s, '60s and '70s, the style was composed more of innuendo and scatological humor (Tappazuckie's lyrics "Catch her in the garage- give her little massage", or Welton Irie's chant about the cockroach in the toilet), by the 90s, the lyrics had become more graphic.*

Being witness to a dance in Jamaica was disconcerting. The set up was diametrically opposed to what a typical rock concert in North American was like. There was no stage. The performers, quite big celebrities in Jamaica, gathered around the 'microphone center'. Standing almost right up against the the mixing board, each one could reach the mic when his turn came. A small light glowed so that the 'selector' could find the records and place the needle down in the groove. The faces of the deejays were revealed slightly by the light, but people were there to listen and to dance, not to watch. The crowd responded to sounds – the drum roll at the start of a new record, the words of the deejay. The deejays just 'rapped' into the mic, and danced along by themselves in time. The focus was not on the visual 'performance' element. People in the audience sipped on a Guinness or smoked a spliff, standing in the corners or dancing with partners in the shadows under the dark, starry sky, not paying each other any mind. The whole show was a multi-sensory experience - the smell of ganja burning, the brush of occasional cool night, breeze, the motion of bodies swaying in the 'rub-a-dub' style movements and the pounding bass that you could feel deep in the thorax.

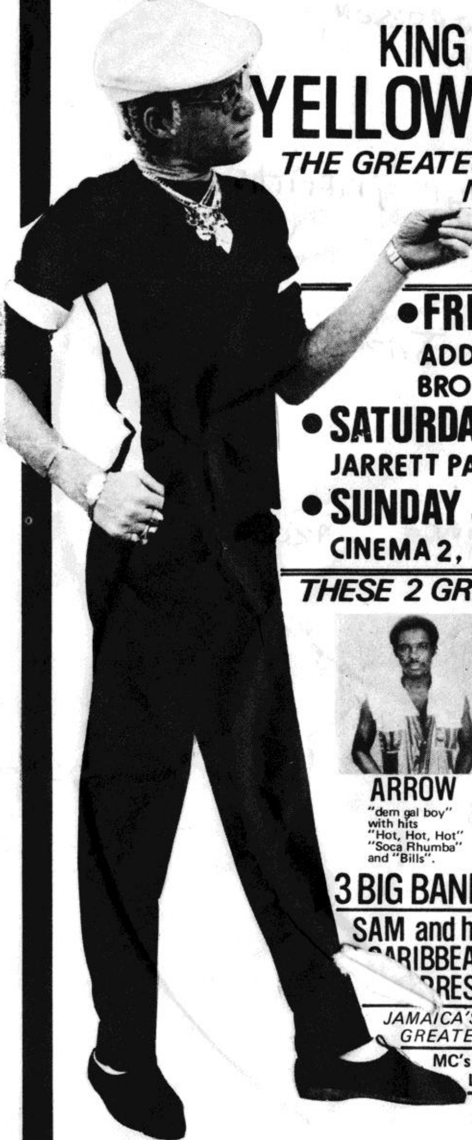
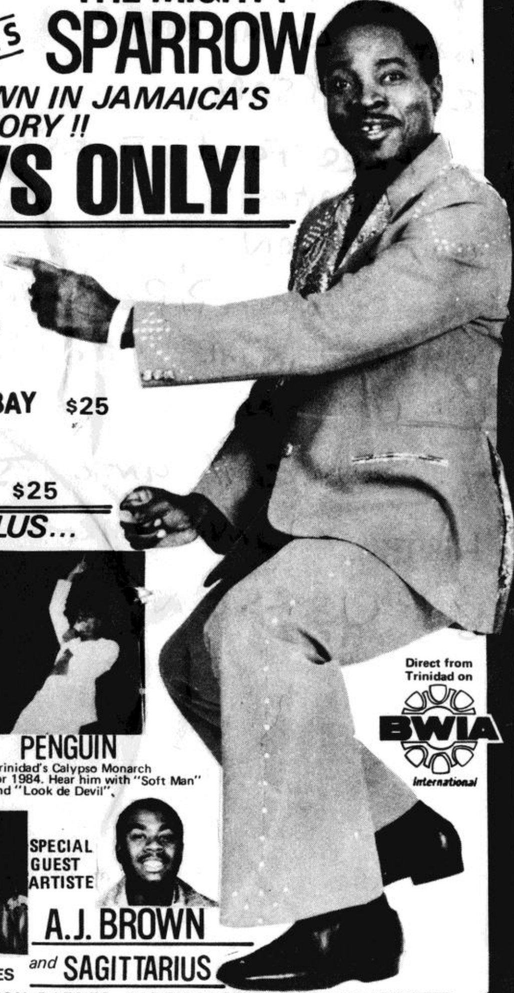
The whole dance experience was entirely new to me. Even the way women dressed to go out for a night on the town was so different from what we were used to seeing at home. For one, Jamaican women (at a dance) did not wear high heels. I never knew if it was a practical consideration due to the bad condition of so many streets or just a fashion. Jamaican women got dressed up in their best, with fancy hairdos and full makeup – and wore flats, something a woman in Europe or the US would never consider. All kinds of flat shoe styles came and went – 'ballet', slave sandals- but the heels stayed low.

Jamaicans seemed to have a different idea of presentation in public. Women in curlers allowed their photos to be taken. A typical American woman had to check her hair and makeup in the mirror. But Jamaicans came out and posed eagerly dressed in whatever they had on, their Sunday best or a t-shirt and torn shorts, curlers and bed slippers, apron or housecoat. Jamaicans weren't limited by the same divisions between public life that we were. Living outside the house so much of the time, in public because of the heat, the details of everyday life normalized. Using curlers wasn't something to hide. It was a;; part of life.

Reggae Quarterly #2 1983

When we were ready to launch the second edition of RQ, we had a long debate about the wisdom of putting Yellowman on the cover. Yellowman was hot, selling out concert halls on his first tour abroad. But, in the end, we chose Burning Spear. We reasoned that, at that point in time, you couldn't sell a reggae magazine without a dread on the cover. Placing a dancehall artist upfront was still risky. So, we gave Yellow back cover instead. Yellowman merited a feature story. He was helping break dancehall big internationally. But in 1983, reggae was still in a delicate balance internationally. Dancehall was coming up, but 'roots' was hanging on strong, and the

factions were polarized. Many foreign journalists and photographers had abandoned the field because they felt so strongly that dancehall had killed off everything good and noble in reggae and replaced it with juvenile rubbish. Reggae had lost its purpose, its revolutionary zeal, and was no longer fighting for the people. It was entertainment now, silly, and without a higher calling. In disgust, reporters went on to look at music in other countries or followed the roots vein that continued to run alongside dancehall, however, demised it might have become. And Yellowman, with his slack lyrics, boastfulness and comedy, was the very incarnation of all the critics feared would become of their music if the dancehall scene were let loose.

Yellowman with Sunshine in Toronto

Promoter Larry “Rapper” Woodcock called us and gave us the heads up – Yellowman was going to be in Sunshine Disco’s basement at 11 am to look through the records before the big dance. Dave was at work, and, not wanting to go alone, I asked Son Walters of S&W Records, if he could go up with me. Yellowman hadn't arrived yet (reggae involves a lot of waiting), so we sat on the steps leading downstairs to the basement until Yellow made his grand entrance dressed in full camouflage. He was polite and friendly but not casual. He always remained a bit reserved when business was at hand. All his playful antics were reserved for his performances. In the basement, he spent some time seriously considering the records and dubplates, and when he was done, we all piled in the car and drove back to Son's record shop to get some photos.

Deejays were taking over reggae. They had been getting more popular throughout the '70s, but Yellowman's popularity cleared the way for a huge deejay ascendancy that pretty much defined where reggae went over the next decades.

RQ #2 reflected the deejay surge with articles on Errol Scorcher, Ranking Joe, Ringo, and an article on the Gemini sound system. A bit of balance was provided with a profile on the Roots Radics band (the musicians credited with creating the new sound in reggae), and foundation artist Delroy Wilson. Some Canadian content - locals Noel Ellis, son of Alton, Leroy Brown, and Winston Francis. And of course. Burning Spear.

It wasn't that we were dismissing the importance of roots artists. It was just that dancehall was so popular at the time. Roots music was still around, but it wasn't changing. Whereas dancehall, driven by the inexhaustible energy of youth, .mutated like a virus. Every day there were new artists, new 'patterns' in deejaying, new dances, new clothing styles.

The demand for the authentic dancehall experience abroad was growing so fast that even the sound systems had started touring and showing up in concert halls in Toronto and New York. In order to represent what was really happening in Jamaica, we wrote about a lot of deejays, selectors, sound systems. We included as many foundation artists as possible.

But as the decade progressed and dancehall became more embedded in the music scene, it became harder and harder to make the distinction between 'pure' roots and dancehall. For example, what kind of artist was Half Pint? He sang in many dances, and his hits broke in the dancehall, but he sang songs with serious lyrics, on the themes of poverty and suffering, sometimes of love, but never about the dance. Where did an artist like Don Carlos place in what was becoming a spectrum rather than a genre with clearly marked divisions?

In 1983, Toronto had a pretty lively dancehall scene going on, and we were able to interview many of the artists that were passing through. Former Heptone’s lead singer Leroy Sibbles had his own sound system, named Papa Melody, and was bringing the current hit-making dancehall artists to perform with his set. That’s where we were able to talk to artists like Ringo, Ranking Joe, Sammy Dread and Mikey Jarrett.

We assumed that if an ‘official’ artist like Leroy, recipient of all kinds of awards in Canada (where he had been living for many years), was promoting these dances, the venue (the basement in his home) ought to be safe.

The dances he held were, on the whole, well run. At least until Ringo let off the gunman lyrics on night in 1983. Gunman lyrics were the style.. All the deejays were talking about 'gunman move' and 'gunman connection' and 'M16' etc. When deejays started with the gunman lyrics in Jamaica, the air exploded with a hail if gunshots fired up to the sky. Everyone had warned Ringo not to mention guns in a basement in Canada, but he was an impulsive kid who, like all the young deejays, liked to show off.

When Ringo began to chant his gunman in Leroy's basement, the bullets ricocheted and people were hit. One happened to be our friend Paul who wrote about cassettes in the first issue of RQ. One guy inside the dance got six bullets. Paul had run outside and was hit. We ran into Ringo a year later in Joe Gibbs record store in Kingston and we happened to be with Paul. So Paul got to show Ringo his scar from the bullet that hit him in that dance.

Getting shot in a dancehall session was a constant hazard in Toronto, as it was in Jamaica and anywhere sound systems played. We knew several people who were hit and made many hospital visits. We blamed it on the sensory overload - exciting music, ganja smoke, liquor flowing – and guns- often all in the tiny basement of someone's row house.

The dancehall scene in Toronto was still very separate from the stage show circuit. The dances were attended mainly by recently arrived Jamaicans. They featured artists who were popular in Jamaica at that time – the latest celebrities, rather than the more established stars. People were flown up to perform on the basis of one big hit. Stage shows, on the other hand, featured better-known artists who had a recording history and performed with a live band. These concerts were advertised on the radio and in local entertainment papers and attracted a mixed crowd. This included artists like the Mighty Diamonds, Gregory Isaacs, The Gladiators.

Against this backdrop, we imagined that the magazine could help bring down the barriers between the two sides of live reggae performances and invite a more mixed audience out to see dancehall. However, it turned out that radio was a far more effective means of bringing dancehall to the general public. Dave was now a full year into his show, Reggae Showcase. Spinning records under the name Lord Selector, he often hosted deejays live on the air, toasting and doing their dancehall thing, allowing the audience to taste a little sample of what live dance sessions had to offer.

Reggae Quarterly #3

Issue #3 was a breakthrough for us because Pablo finally allowed us to not only interview him, but to take his photo as well. Of course, he wanted us to include information about the artists he was promoting at the time - which was more than fine with us as we liked the work they were doing and thought that they deserved wider recognition.

With RQ #3, we were finally achieving the look we wanted and the balance between dancehall and roots. One of our most enjoyable interviews was the time we spent with Sister Nancy. Promoter Rapper brought Nancy to the radio station. She didn't miss a beat but began

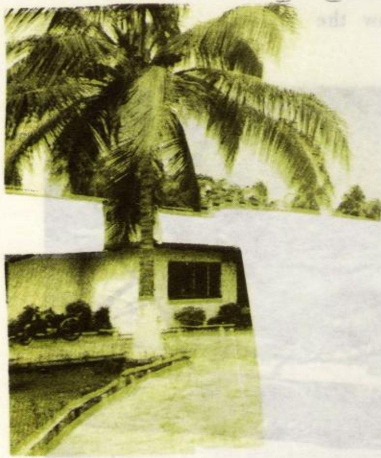
spontaneously toasting live over the air with Rueben Levi, a skinny little youth from England, who performed his lyric about someone named ‘Sister Mercle’ who danced around in a circle.

Don Carlos and Gold were the hottest hit-makers at the time. Although they were dreads, and their lyrics were mainly cultural,* their music had heavy rotation as dub-plates in the dance and they often showed up to sing live.

**Dealing with issues of suffering, Rastafarianism, living a moral life, black identity, etc*

Singers Leroy Smart and Sugar Minott were both featured in the issue, were roots singers who were about to make dance hall history. Likewise, Johnny Osbourne represented the transition very well. A singer from back in the early days of reggae, he made a huge comeback with dancehall. Barrington Levy was already one of the top singers in Jamaica. Although just a youth making his name singing roots and culture, he was about to break internationally with dancehall hits.
Reggae Quarterly #3, taken as a whole, showed the subtle shifts that were taking place - the way culture and dancehall were edging into each other's territory - and new artists were relying on dub-plate and dancehall exposure to get ahead.

1984 Sandringham Ave



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Life back in Morant Bay had been peaceful in the evenings, a welcome relief after being jostled and poked by the rush hour crowds squeezing into the minibuses for the rush hour commute. But traveling the distance to and from downtown Kingston was challenging. So we decided to find a place to stay in Kingston for our next trip.

Producer George Phang, whom we had met in Toronto, suggested a little hotel he knew on Sandringham Ave., certainly nothing luxurious, but close to Half Way Tree and all the major bus routes downtown. Eucal Crawford, the owner, welcomed us. He knew Phang and was happy to help out any of his friends. The layout consisted of a two-story row of rooms across from what would once have been used as a pool, although now it was littered with decaying fallen leaves. Our tiny room on the second level had a bed and a dresser. A small, cloth curtain separated the bathroom. I think one other person stayed there at least a couple of nights. But other than that, I can't recall ever seeing any other guests -except for Volcano selector Danny Dread who spent a weekend there with a girlfriend. The hotel seemed to have a reputation for having housed various members of the music community who lived in Kingston and were just looking for a convenient place to hang out with a new romantic interest for the evening. So close to Skateland. So convenient for a tryst.

At the end of our stay, Eucal took us to the end of the building and showed us a two-room apartment he also rented and offered to let us stay there free in exchange for an ad in Reggae Quarterly magazine. The living room/kitchen/dining room area contained a couch, a Formica table, two chairs, a fridge and a gas stove. The other room contained a bed and a ceiling fan. That apartment became our home whenever we came to Jamaica, so much so that we could leave a suitcase of our belongings with the Crawford's and they would hold it for us until we returned.

The one employee was a young woman named Clover. There was no gate or security system in place. So when the power would go out in the nights, we would start to feel nervous sitting in the dark listening to the dogs howl in the distance, attentive to every sound. But nothing ever happened. Our biggest adventure in the apt was when the knob broke off of the oven and a long jet of blue flame started shooting out of the crater left behind. Clover managed to shut off the gas before the whole place caught fire. But the stove was dead. Clover replaced the stove with a double-sided electric burner which worked well until the flooding in '86 when the roof leaked and covered it in water.

The bugs would come in and keep us company in the evenings. Among the common mosquitos and flies were some that were new to us - like the giant flying cockroaches you see in tropical climates. The dilemma was always whether it was more unpleasant to have an insect the size of a baby's shoe flying around our heads or to squash it and have to peel its mashed body off the floor.

At dusk, bites would appear on my ankles. The voracious mosquitos came out to feed at sundown and seemed to stick around all night, banishing what little sleep one could achieve surrounded by the heat and the noise. Sympathetic friends brought us mosquito coils which look like an electric stove element on a little stand. You lit one end, and as the spiral burned inwards, it emits a plume of toxic gray smoke that discourages the little beasts - to a certain extent.

At night, the hotel was quiet, but the sounds from all around would begin drifting in the open window. People talking, laughing. Motorcycles roaring up the road. The bass line of a reggae song from a dance at Skateland. When the wind shifted directions, the sounds changed. Scraps of a different song from another dance floated by. And always the dogs barking. The high walls between the yards prevented the air from circulating, and the only breeze came from the slightly

warped fan overhead. Waiting for sleep to come, it felt like the night would go on forever. When morning came, we often awoke to a surprise visitor. Louis Haldane, brother of a friend of ours in Toronto, arrived first thing to wake us up with a box of 100 Ricky Grant albums (Poverty People) to bring back to Toronto. Once Tonic showed up a bit before 7, and on finding us still in bed, commented, "Boy – you sleep long a-morning!" and left. But usually, it was Prince Jazzbo who seemed to take some strange delight in showing up at the crack of dawn and rousing us with his early morning cheer. He seemed to find it endlessly amusing that we were still in bed when the sun was up and he had been on the road for 'hours' (as he claimed).

Sandringham Ave, a short block leading north off Molynes Road, was a mixed bag of people and businesses. The once-thriving but now somewhat faded Twin Gates Plaza was a few blocks away along Constant Spring Road, where the stores were more upscale. Not very upscale, just more so. In the other direction, where Sandringham met Molynes Road, there was a tiny corner shop with a large Ting sign out front (Ting being the local soft drink with a grapefruit flavor) and a bar. The shop sold basic food items and some dry goods but did their largest share of business with warm or cold sodas and beer.

On our first visit to Jamaica, when we were staying in the Indies House hotel, we went looking for some snacks in one of the local supermarkets. Not seeing much in the way of fresh produce, and not yet knowing I had to go to an outdoor market for it, I had finally settled on tin of Grace Mango juice. The only problem was that I needed a can opener, something I was used to picking up for next to nothing in any corner store at home. But the only one available in the Kingston supermarket cost something like ten times what the tin of juice cost. I suppose, like so many things in Jamaica, can-openers were imported and, therefore, 'dear'. After that, I began making a list of things to pack for subsequent trips. Can opener was at the top.

Prices in the supermarkets were high because so many items were imported (like cheese $5.65 for ten slices, or instant coffee at $27 for 6 oz. at Twin Gates Plaza.) So we quickly learned to buy what we needed from the 'bend down' markets (street markers were you have to 'bend down' to pick up the produce), corner shops and street vendors.

The small shop on Molynes Road was well enough stocked for our minimal needs. Like most supermarkets and corner stores, it was Chinese owned (a phenomenon I have witnessed in other Caribbean countries). The inside of the store was fenced with mesh leaving a small window open at the counter. You had to ask the lady for what you wanted and she would fetch it for you.* To my amazement, eggs were never refrigerated, something I never completely got used to. I was always suspicious, waiting for the day the eggs would turn out to have gone bad. But they were always fresh and tasty. You asked for the number of eggs you wanted, and the lady at the store put them in a small plastic bag, rolled up the corners and tied in a knot. Or you just took them loose and hoped for the best on the way home. Fruits and vegetables were sold by vendors who walked the streets with carts or drove through in an open-back truck. I discovered what are now two of my favorite fruits – soursop and naseberry (AKA nispero). I also learned from the street vendors how to peel an orange. You started at the top while turning the orange with the left hand so that the peel came off in one long spiral strip. Likewise, I learned how to prepare a pineapple for consumption. You had to slice the little nibs out several at a time by

making deep diagonal cuts all around. The vendors could accomplish these remarkable feats in less than a minute with a machete in one hand and the fruit in the other.
The pieces were then served in a plastic bag in neat slices.

**That's where I discovered the laundry soap that came in a bar and cleaned everything so much better than powdered detergent. Everyone there used it. The cost was nominal, but it worked.*

Whenever we walked down Sandringham to the shop, we would attract a small group of curious local children who would follow us, wanting to touch our hair, feel our skin. We would get our food, buy a round of box juice for all, and head back to our apartment again with our entourage giggling and following close behind us.

As usual, in front of the shop was a street vendor sitting by a wooden box selling loose cigarettes (you can buy one or two), Rizla brand rolling paper and little plastic bags of "sweeties" (candy). Next to the shop was a typical local bar with a jukebox against the wall. One lonely man sat perpetually in the back, downing white rum. That is where we got to know the neighbors. The person who became our closest ally was a tall, wiry young man by the name of Tonic. The other was a heavily built, laid back, middle-aged man named Fields. Tonic and his baby mother lived in a one-room dwelling in the yard behind the bar with their 8-year-old daughter and newborn. The first time we dropped by Tonic's home, the lights were on. But shortly after, the police discovered his illegal hook up and took him down to the station where he had to give them 'a small change'. When he was released, he returned to a home without power – at least until a new hook-up was established.

Back on the corner, we used to chat with Tonic at the bar in the evenings. Tonic loved to remind us that you could "speak out" in the corner bar because the area was so solidly socialist. Red Cap was, according to the locals, a socialist beer (whereas Heineken, in the green bottle, was for the laborites). Any little thing that went wrong, like if the jukebox weren't working, Tonic, would call it a 'Seaga thing'. Tonic introduced us to the local football star, a dread named the 'Gorgon' and copied us some cassettes from the local sound, Ghetto Roots.

The brother of a friend of ours from Toronto, Sashy Nice, also lived in the area. So Tonic took us around to look for him. Our friend Blue was a concert promoter and wanted us to get in touch with Sashy to help us round up Wailing Soul and some other artists he wanted to bring to Toronto. It wasn't always easy even for artists to get a Visa, and every day, a long line of applicants formed outside various embassies.

We set out for Sashy's yard, heading out along a trail that started behind the bar and took us through the triangular territory between Molynes Road and Hagley Park Road. Lined by rough brush and undergrowth, the trail passed several one and two-room wooden homes. In one lived a plump 16-year-old white girl Tonic wanted us to meet. Requesting a photo of Dave and me with the young women, Tonic explained he wanted it because "you look similar." As we coiled through the paths between the brushes, we stumbled on the homes of other locals we had come t know like the youth John Wayne who was always on the corner smoking ganja.

We eventually came to a clearing where the dirt paths seemed to lead off in several directions with trees and large brushes obscuring the view. There wasn’t much back there - low brush and tiny wooden shacks surrounded by animals - chicken, goats, dogs and a mother pig with piglets. In the center was a field with a standpipe where a child was bathing. Beside it, a crumbling bathroom and an open, outdoor shower- really just a raised water spout- where people in various stages of undress took turns showering. The field had been a battleground during the years of armed conflict between supporters of the two opposing political parties. Tonic pointed out the spot where some 'laborites' had been gunned down.

Sashays home was just around the corner from the KSAC Animal Pound. The family home was painted with black and red diamonds stating, unequivocally, that the neighborhood was safe for PNP supporters.

When we arrived, Sashy Nice came out to greet us. Looking relaxed in his sweats, he invited us to sit a while so we could talk business. We made our inquiries about reaching the popular Roots group, Wailing Soul, and he offered to help. Little did we know we would be needing his help for an entirely different situation.

The gold chain robbery

One late when afternoon we were walking home along Molynes Road after a day of interviews and photos, a youth holding an ice pick came from behind Dave and grabbed the gold chain from around his neck. As we turned in surprize, we saw him run across the road, jump a fence, and disappear. The simple 12" box chain was a birthday gift with sentimental value. If recovery were possible, it was worth a try. So, we went straight to Tonic and told him the story.

Tonic had an inkling of who it could have been, but to deal with the problem officially, we had to go through the proper channels. Which meant presenting the matter to Sashy. So, as Tonic lead the way, again, we trod the maze of footpaths through the uncharted space behind Molynes Road.

When we reached the yard, Sashy made a grand appearance jumping a 6’ fence and appearing before us in his tracksuits and ‘bling’. He had been conducting business on his ‘phone’ in the cemetery. Home phones were rare because they were so hard to obtain in the dense bureaucracy of the Jamaican telephone system. And for those who couldn't afford a phone anyway, the next best thing was a "bandulu" phone, an illegal hook up to the phone lines, best sought in a deserted cemetery.

At home in Toronto, whenever we got calls at one or two in the morning, we knew immediately that some friend or acquaintance had found a 'bandulu' hook up and bought some time. The connection usually lasted for a few days. Then the police would cut it off and we wouldn't hear from that person for several months. And then - lo and behold - late one night the phone would ring again.

When we told him the story, Sashy knew right away who was involved –a local youth they called Lumphead. Springing instantly into action. Sashy gathered his men and led us to his car.

Packed inside, we drove off to chase down the thief. It didn't take long before we spotted him walking on Maxfield Ave. Sashy did a quick u turn, swinging the car violently up onto the curb. The very instant he put the brake on, Sashy and his men jumped out and grabbed the youth. Unknown to us at the time, the plan was to stuff him in the trunk of the car and take him to a "private prison". But that never happened. The altercation attracted the attention of a roving unmarked police car, and a couple of officers came over to see what was going on.

One of the officers took hold of the youth who continued to struggle and protest while yelling out, “Them beat me! Cokeheads!” and such things until the policeman shoved him in the unmarked vehicle, ordering him, “Mass yu face!". The boy ducked low immediately and all of us, in our separate cars, drove to the Crossroads Police station.

At the station, the corporal, on hearing the tale, snorted quickly and turned to Lumphead, shouting, "Them shoulda kill you, bwoy! Them shoulda kill you!” Lumphead, sitting in the corner on the floor, began pleading for his life with real fear in his eyes. The female officer and the Corporal seated behind the desk started debating whether the crime was 'robbery with assault' or just plain old 'robbery'. The woman asked, rhetorically, "What is robbery? Tell me, what is robbery?" To which the Corporal responded, "Cho! It's just…it's just…robbery!" One of the plainclothes officers, boasting of being a friend of Officer Laing, wanted to make a phone call, but the female officer wouldn't allow him. She kept repeating, "But I don't know you as police." Tonic, and the other fellows who were with us, started telling us not to press charges because the judge was mean and would give him three years. But it was out of our hands at that point. The judge set a court date and we had to be there.

When our date arrived, we showed up at court early. Our case was set for the morning session, but almost at the very end. So, there was nothing else to do but sit in the back and watch the impatient and efficient justice, Miss Joyce Bennett, preside over a range of local cases. Most of what she heard seemed to involve a complaint of someone else having boxed, cut, pushed or hit the complainant, or owed the complainant a debt of as little $2.50. For example, according to one lady, the accused "t’ump her in the head”…no - what she really did was “grab her” and hold her against the door. Another woman was filing charges against a man who “came in the house and was feeling up my breasts”. When asked if she knew the man, she nodded, “He’s a friend of the man who fixes our TV.” And so it continued. Another accused a man of throwing a bottle through the window that cut her arm. Then he threw a rock. As they were fighting, his daughter ran into the yard to scare them; The accused cut her on her head (but it healed already). They had an argument in the street and she was calling him names, so he called her a fat ____ and so she threw up her skirt and bent over and told him, 'Suck me!" and he cut her on the head.

When our case came up, the judges asked Lumphead if he had taken the chain. "No," he replied. The judge asked him again. "No…." He hesitated a moment,   "…well, yes." And then broke into a long complaint of how we "got our friends and drove him down to beat him, but he didn't have the chain."   The lawyer jumped in, "But the police found the chain on you." "No," Lumphead replied sadly and desperately, “They started to beat me”- incidentally, no one had touched him. “And where did they find the chain?" the lawyer continued. "Well…it looks like… in my pocket," a defeated Lumphead admitted with a sigh, at which point, the lawyer rose and

announced to the court, “It must have fallen there during the ‘beating’ like manna from heaven.” The room erupted in guffaws and Lumphead sank into his seat to await sentencing.*

**He did get some time, but from what I can recall, it wasn't long before he was back on the street, but he never bothered us again.*

Channel One

On our next visit, in 1984, we started out with Sandringham as our home base, so convenient due to its proximity to Halfway Tree where we could catch a minibus anywhere. Kingston hadn't changed much. The water still locked off – now every night at 11:30. The streets were still hot and dusty and the air filled with the smell of burning trash and car exhaust.

But this trip, we had a new friend, producer George Phang.

We had come to know George in 1983. Phang was in Toronto to meet with Jam-Can records which were going to press his first releases, 3 or 4 disco 45s with Echo Minott, Little John, and I can't recall who else. George was testing the waters for a new career in the music business. He and his long-time friend Yumpi came down to CKLN to run off some two track tapes and to promote the new releases on the air.

Wherever we walled in Kingston with Phang, people would come up to us and say earnestly, “You’re in good hands”. Phang was well known and instantly recognized. Being in his company opened doors in studios, offices and sessions.

Our first stop on this trip was Channel One. Wandering inside, we ran into dub cutter Squingene Francis, an impulsive, youth, with a round belly and a short attention span. We introduced ourselves as friends of Yumpi. When Squingie heard the name Yumpi, his face lit up and he announced, “Come on in!” and introduced us all around as “George Phang’s people”.

At that moment, Squingene Francis was sitting in the musical power center of Kingston, the Channel One dub cutting room. The tiny, closet-like space, with just room enough for the dub-cutting machine and one or two onlookers, was where the latest productions were transferred onto dubplates to play on the sound systems all around Jamaica. And the music coming from Channel One was hot.

A group of new singers was being auditioned and groomed by Kenneth Hookim, one of the three remaining Hookim brothers who owned the studio and pressing plant. The atmosphere was upbeat as youths like Frankie Paul, Michael Palmer, Half Pint, Pad Anthony and Wayne Smith gathered around chatting and smoking, enjoying some soup from the stand across the street, waiting their turn in the studio to voice a record or cut a dub-plate.

Compared to Tubby's, things were pretty loose in Channel One. Scientist, the engineer on duty that day, was sprawled across the piano listening, rapt, to Sugar Minott playing the keyboards and singing a few impromptu lyrics. Tiring quickly with the lack of activity, Scientist suddenly jumped up and snatched away Sugar's hat and put it on his head backward.

Even when the crowds were cleared out of the studio proper, and the musicians were recording a rhythm track, extraneous people loitered about the control room dancing, smoking and cheering on the engineer as he pulled down the treble and boosted the base.

Artists were everywhere, coming and going. The scene was chaotic. Yet, despite the bustle and the numbers of wandering people, there were long stretches of time in which nobody appeared to really be doing anything especially productive. Horace Andy would be idly strumming the piano with Squingene nearby entertaining the crowd with stories of spending the right throwing up after too much fun at the dance. Trevor Junior passed through showing off his latest 45. Prince Jazzbo was in the yard directing traffic. Michael Palmer could be seen outside with his buddies in the middle of a game of dice, cursing and ranting. Robbie Shakespeare stopped briefly to drop off a tape. Suddenly, a youth came running in breathlessly, shouting about a gun he got when a fleeing laborite dropped it in the street. Nobody paid him any mind. We were in the process of handing a magazine to singer Hugh Griffiths, when veteran producer Niney (The Observer) snatched it away hollering, "No one can keep the magazine from The Observer!" (When we later asked what he was working on these days, he replied, "I'm not working right now – I'm just observing.") Across the street, Tacu, reported to have been Jimmy Cliff's chef and is pictured on the cover of Sugar Minott's LP, Buy out the Bar, was cooking up a stew for the hungry artists.

Although the studio was busy, the real action was happening in the dub cutting room. Producers came non- stop, carrying their latest two-track tapes to put on their imported acetates. Junjo would fly in peering over his sunglasses, swerving rapidly around people like a snake darting among the rocks. Too fast to be pinned down, he would finish his business and then vanish as swiftly and silently as he came.

While the dubplate was being cut, the tape would run. The booming music would generate immediate rejoicing in the tiny room and the door would fly open as the singing and dancing spilling out into the studio yard. The music was like a magnet. Once when he was cutting a dub-plate of his own recording, Leroy Smart suddenly flung open the dub-cutting room door and yelled, "Murder!" and ran dancing and singing into the yard. Sometimes, Squingie would get so carried away by the music, he had to be cleared from the dub-cutting room so that serious business could be conducted.

King Jammy

While many newcomers were being discovered at Channel One, the studio they were destined for would be Jammy's, where many of them would make their career-defining recordings.

On our first visit to Jammy in 1984, the king was in the yard fixing the blade on the air conditioner that had broken during the session. Delton Screechy was sitting in the shade. The yard surrounding his private residence, which housed his one-room mixing studio, was calm and quiet.

Bunny Lee stopped by decked out in his shorts and sailor cap, and we fell into a conversation. To continue talking, Mr. Lee drove us to his house in Meadowbrook, high in the hills overlooking the ghettos, where the houses are larger and more widely spaced, where trees grow and a cool breeze blows night and day.

As soon as we arrived, Bunny said he had to drive to his other house. So he put a video of a Black Uhuru performance in the VHS machine and left. After waiting for an hour or two, we got bored. But, now far away from any place we were familiar with, we had no idea how to get back to Molynes Road. Trevor Castell, Locksley's brother, who was sitting with us, offered to walk us

down to the bus. He stopped to strike a few unusual poses along the way for the camera. Once on the bus, we realized we really hadn't been all that far away from downtown. It just seemed like a different world, with the rolling hills lined with mansions and green spaces. We never heard from Bunny Lee again.

Back at Jammy's the following day, Jah Thomas was skanking in the yard with a big spliff as if he had been wound up and had no off switch, Thomas kept up the good-humored chanting and toasting whereever there was an audience. King Jammy gave us some music and even let Dave try mixing a tune though the board. Half Pint saw Dave sitting on the floor and said apologetically (in good humor), "You see, in Jamaica we don't have many seats." We later came to see Pint often both in Jamaica and Toronto as he toured on the strength of his string of hits with George Phang

Back in 1984, Jammy's studio wasn't crowded. A lot of Jamaicans didn't like to come to Waterhouse because of the reputation it had in the '70s. So, those who did make the trip came for a good reason and then left quickly. Hanging around too late was a hazard. It happened to us several times.

The first time, we were sitting comfortably in the yard, the time passing, and we didn't notice how late it had gotten until the sun was low on the horizon. The whole face of the studio changed as night approached. The singers and musicians drifted away. A fire burned in the yard and the deaf-mute, Dummy Roy, brought out tins of meat to feed the guard dogs. Suddenly active after slumbering all afternoon in the hot sun, the large dogs came bounding out. An eerie kind of quiet descended on the area, a kind of country quiet unmarked by vehicle or motor sounds. Just the distant strains of music interrupted by the howls and barks of dogs.

Once darkness fell, it became impossible to get a taxi to come and take us back to the hotel. We called every company in town. Iris (Jammy's wife-to-be) sat with us reading numbers out of the phone book as we dialed, and each one assured us they were sending a cab. But I guess the drivers had a different idea and not one ever showed up. Finally, Squngene agreed to walk us to the bus stop, and, along West Bay Farm Road, we ran into a taxi and jumped in. But the same thing happened again and again, whenever we let darkness catch us far from home.

Encounter with Madness

Back in downtown, Kingston, we were walking up Orange Street when a disheveled man in madras shorts came running up to us on with a pre-release 45 in his hand. "I'm Junior Byles. Buy this record," he announced breathlessly. Nothing out of the ordinary. We met delusional people several times a day in Kingston. With a notable lack of health facilities and high levels of poverty, the city left most people with mental disturbances to wander the street. This casual attitude caused problems as 'mad' people could, and did, turn violent, sometimes harming people or causing property damage. So, it was no surprise to meet a slightly unhinged stranger claiming to be a famous artist. It had happened before.

Naturally, we didn't believe him at first. But the gentleman was so persistent, we decided to give him a chance to prove his identity. So we made a deal. We all went to Tuff Gong together where he played the record and sang along. No doubt - it was him. He still had that smooth, effortless style of singing. But he didn't look too good. When he heard that we were from Toronto, he

wrote a short letter in my notebook asking Pete Weston to pay some of the money he claimed to be owed for the recordings Pete had made with him (like the album Jordon and the 45 Oh Carolina).

Obviously, Junior Byles wasn't enjoying the rewards of his labor. In the 1960s and 1970s, he was known as an exceptionally talented singer and songwriter with hits like Fade Away, Curley Locks and Beat Down Babylon. After a series of personal crises, he started to absent himself from the scene periodically, returning, each time, a little more shaken. By 1985, Byles was a downtrodden man wandering the streets, looking for a handout and a way to recuperate what he was owed from so many different people in the business.

Gregory Isaacs' brother told us Byles had been that way for a few years. At some point in his youth, Byles used to be a fireman. But now, a poor, unkempt Byles wandered the street of Kingston looking for handouts. Phillip Fraser recalled an article in the paper about how he had 'licked down a girl with a stone.' Once, we spotted him on Parade wearing a red cone-shaped party hat. He showed up frequently at the Youth Promotion headquarters where some of the personnel would tease him and run him out. Once, he pulled out of his pocket a beat-up old cover from a US fashion magazine featuring a blond model and showed it to everyone explaining that this was how his "curly locks" had looked. Before he left the Youth Promotion yard, he took up a collection to get a little food or do some laundry. He stood sadly in front of a group of onlookers, took a leather wallet from his pocket and held it upside down. A single nickel fell to the ground. With a forlorn expression, he took the wallet and handed it around for donations.

When Dave and I went down to visit to Bishop Reid on Maxfield (about getting married in Sugar Minott's yard), we ran into Byles again. Dressed in his rags, carrying an old, beat-up walking stick, he decided to follow us down to see the pastor. The "Bishop" Reid was the pastor of Sugar Minott's mother's evangelical church. While we were outside waiting to see the 'Bishop.' Byles started stripping flowers off the bushes. When Dave told him to stop cutting down people's flowers, he responded as if deeply offended – and using the royal 'we' - "We are not cutting them down, we are tearing them off!" Which he followed with a long speech about how the flowers are the "wealth of Jamaica" and are for everyone.

Bishop Reid was, luckily, not bothered by the garden rampage, and we were able to make our arrangements for the wedding. But Byles proceeded to follow us back to the Youth Promotion yard, with his arms full of flowers and insisted on posing for a picture with me holding the flowers (and my hair in his mouth). Later we saw him wandering around Parade on his way to Randy's to bring flowers to Carl.

One afternoon, he was in the Youth Promotion yard arguing with singer Lloyd Hemmings (who was not in the best condition himself at the time). Hemmings kept trying to show Byles the chords he was using to write a song he was composing called "\'smoking is a part of eating.' Byles struggled to get a word in, but couldn't as Hemmings droned on about time signatures. Apparently the song was about Ducky Wobbles who 'wouldn't pass him the chalice.' Finally, in frustration, Byles turned to walk away. "I taught him all that, you know," Byles muttered and left in disgust

What had happened to change Junior Byles? As always, rumors flowed. People told us that the money Lee Perry made off his work with Byles had built the famous Black Ark Studio. It had driven Byles mad to see his trusted producer and mentor take everything to boost himself while

Byles struggled with the little he was paid. On the other hand, a prominent reggae producer, now living in the US assured me, confidentially, that the cause of Byles' troubles was "science." Science, or obeah, refers to witchcraft, the casting of spells, or the use of herbs and potions to achieve gains or carry out revenge. According to the producer, a girl he had gotten pregnant and then spurned, had worked obeah on him, which had driven him mad.

That same story, or a variant of it, seemed to crop up frequently in Jamaica - the rejected lover seeking revenge through otherworldly means. Many seemingly inexplicable events were blamed on some type of supernatural intervention. ‘Science’ was taken very seriously in Jamaica, a country where people still held onto traditional superstitions. “Duppies” (ghosts) walked on earth with people, and other supernatural beings, like the rolling calf or Old Hige, were spotted regularly.

Lloyd Hemmings, who used to do a lot of backup singing for Sugar Minott, claimed that he used to carry kerosene oil and matches because if a duppy is following you, the best way to scare it off, is take the oil in your mouth and, as you spit it out, strike a match and light it while you turn your head to throw the flame over your shoulder.

Whatever may be the cause, troubled people wandered the city streets and countryside every day. The music community has had its well-known victims. Trombonist Don Drummond was convicted of murdering his girlfriend in 1965 and was sent to Bellevue, the local hospital in which singer Slim Smith was interned in 1972. Legendary producer Lee Perry has made a career of exhibiting his madness. Barry Brown had been one of the top singers of the late 70s. But as the 80s began, Barry was showing signs of a change. His suspiciousness became more pronounced as his anger grew. Not only aimed at producers who failed to assign proper royalties, Barry's rage also encompassed all those 'imitators' who used his style to advance their own careers, a new generation of singers who modeled themselves on his vocal patterns and ended up with contracts and tours abroad.

His wife, an American named Snowbird who was living with him at the time in Jamaica, would wait patiently and try to lead him to the studio during his more lucid periods. And he did do one or two other recordings, but his deep paranoia kept him out of the scene, and he had no desire to be interviewed for our magazine. His parting words to us were, "If you see someone else with a magazine like yours, kill them before they destroy you."

Chiney and Gold

On one of our first visits to Channel One, we were approached by a pair of young men who wanted to interest us in the work they were doing independent of the big studios. At the time, they were handling the Jamaican side of the business for George ‘Alcapone’ Nicolson from Montreal. George ran the Tasha label, flying into JA periodically while Goldie and Chiney stayed in Kingston rounding up artists and booking studio time. George was mainly working with young artists like Midnight Riders, Michael Palmer, Steve Knight, Patrick Andy, Frankie Paul and Frankie Jones – all the young artists who were coming around at Channel One at the time and breaking into the business with 45s from Channel One.

Gold and Chineyman were invaluable as guides. Once we were leaving a late-night session at the House of Leo with Gold and, as we were crossing the street, Gold suddenly hailed down the

passing bus and put us on it, calling to us, "Take this. It will get you home!" Later he explained that he has spotted some unsavory types at the corner and decided that the brightly lit bus would be safer than hanging around in the dark waiting for a taxi. Kingston was unpredictable, and it helped to have someone around who could read situations.

Chineyman lived across Maxfield Ave and around the corner with his brother, engineer and musician Barnabas, aka Crucial Bunny, and his mother. Goldie lived in the yard right next door to the studio. His dwelling consisted of a single dethatched 10x10 foot cement brick room among several similar units. The families had a slightly bigger space, often with a small veranda. All shared a communal kitchen. A row of outhouses lined the eastern wall. Chickens and lone pups roamed the dirt floor of the yard and the laundry hung on lines strung between units.

Chiney and Gold were best friends at the time but very different people. Gold was very clear-skinned, covered in freckles with cropped orange hair. He had gotten a job at the Hitbound pressing plant where he operated a record press. Quiet, thoughtful, serious about life, Goldie still loved to smoke a spliff and take in a dance. We could sit for hours with Gold just 'reasoning.' Like on a slow Sunday when nothing was open - except church. We would sit in his yard, from time to time sending a little youth to go find a corner shop that would sell us a box juice or a beer. Even that was hard on Sunday

Chiney, on the other hand, didn't talk a lot. More restless than Gold, Chiney had an edge to him. He didn't relax. But he stuck with us loyally and took us to dances where he would introduce us to artists - provided they weren't active in the Labor Party. When an artist with an activist laborite reputation was in the area, Chiney just stepped back. We had to make our own introductions.

Together or separately, Chiney and Gold accompanied us to dances and studios all over the city. Gold took us around the pressing plants. At first, he was at Hitbound but was hired later by then Sonic. Gold told us the story of how Mr. Lee (Neville Lee of Sonic Sounds) had seen a photo of him working the Hitbound record press in Reggae Quarterly # 5 and decided that Sonic needed a good pressman. He sent for Goldie down at his yard and hired him on the spot. When he reached the Sonic Sounds office, Goldie recalled, the magazine was open on Mr Lee's desk. Goldie later introduced us to producer Harry J when he started at his Harry J Sunset studio.

Eventually, Chiney and Gold had a falling out, and we ended up spending more time with Gold. In the evening, Gold would stop by his local 'juicy' to pick up some freshly made I-tal drinks for us – usually one called Roots and another called Magnum. These natural beverages were made with local medicinal roots and herbs. Both drinks were herbal infusions, but the Magnum was more like a thick, sweet, peanut punch as it contained nuts, condensed milk and Irish moss. They arrived in clean, second-hand whiskey and rum bottles. Several commercialized versions of these drinks were sold in grocery shops and corner stores and advertised as the local herbal Viagra. With our fresh juice, we would all sit and talk into the night, listening to the dogs bark and the music floating over from dances around town. The happy ending is that both Chiney and Gold eventually made it out of Jamaica and now live in the US.

Reggae Quarterly #4

That year, we had less money than usual, so we had to cut corners and print only 2,000 copies of a thin issue, which was a shame because it had been the most exciting issue to put together - all kinds of interesting events went into to its creation. Like meeting a lean and callow Supercat who was here in Toronto with Early B for a dance with African Star. The interview included an hour of the Cat deejaying in the basement of Bally, who ran the local Foundation Sound. At the time, Cat was young and awkward and hadn't yet developed that confident, rebellious presence he later came to be so identified with. He was still quiet and hesitant.

On the other hand, the relaxed, easygoing Early B always had a smile. Moving confidently in the world of entertainment, B had an easy way of getting along with everyone, B made friends quickly. But Cat was uncomfortable in the new environment. Of course, that didn't last long. Cat was ambitious and learned fast, quickly shooting past his mentor, Early B.

That issue saw another first Josie Wales' visit to Toronto. We met Josie Wales in concert promoter Romeo's record store. We felt some trepidation I must admit now, as Josie Wales' reputation preceded him. Rumors circulated - dark tales. They said he was a "bad man," lived a rough, non- repentant life. They said he was so tough that he had taken seven bullets and survived. Still new in the deejay profession, Josie's days of lawlessness were still fresh in people's minds. Those who had come to Canada recently from Jamaica still saw him as a danger before they knew him as an entertainer. And many were reluctant to go to the show. Josie never denied that his past had been a turbid one. But he swore that he had turned to music to alter the outcome. The life he was living was heading in one predetermined direction, and he was going to change that.

With certain apprehensions, Dave and I went up to Romey's shop one afternoon. Romeo had a small record store on the first floor and a 'religious' shop on the second that sold obeah paraphernalia like candles, oils and money-attracting spray. All the Caribbean neighborhoods in town had a couple of these stores dealing in ‘science’. They featured candles carved in the images of skulls, men, women, or the Virgin Mary - and often sold for three figures. The potions were more affordable. There was Oil of the Seven Holy Spirits, Black Cat's Blood, controlling oils. Soaps were popular as were the "Go Away Evil" and "Money Attracting" air sprays.

We waited for two hours perusing the goods. Romey's friend, who owned the Child of God record label, was sitting patiently, correcting by hand all the printed center labels that read "Earl Dunkley" to "Errol Dunkley" for his disco 45. Out of boredom, I asked Romey's friend if the money attracting spray worked, but he just shrugged and grunted, "Well, what do you think?”. We were getting pretty restless when in walked the large, imposing figure of Romeo accompanied by a solemn-looking Josie Wales in a leather jacket and fuzzy tam.

Josie wasn't at all like we had expected. Polite, but reserved, he was clear from the outset that he was determined to make it in the entertainment world. Although he maintained a calm and cheerful demeanor, he had a habit of looking away from you as he spoke, glancing down and to the side. He posed for photos with a big smile, and his eyes wide open. But when he spoke, he kept his gaze to himself.

We grew to like Josie and enjoy his company as we ran into him many more times over the years. He gradually became more open and easy to talk to. By the time we ran into him on U

Roy’s corner, he was downright jovial. And when he came to Toronto for the second time the following year, on this occasion accompanied by Charlie Chaplin, he was up to mischief. But more on that later.

Toyan and Little John were good examples of why we wanted to put together the magazine. Wildly popular at home in JA, they were never mentioned in a foreign press still fixated on Bob Marley and the Rastafarian and roots performers of the ‘70s. But the dancehall world revolved around singers like Little John and Tristan Palma, Patrick Andy, Thriller, Trevor, vocalists who could both record and perform live in the dance, singers who had that upbeat style, singers who could compete with the deejays.

Little John was only 18 at the time and a protégé of the older Toyan. This kind of mentor relationship was common in entertaining circles, a close bond formed between an experienced teacher and a promising young student. Early B was just this kind of figure to a young, fledgling Supercat. For years, Supercat followed Earl B and worked dances with him as he moved from one sound to another as a top attraction. Early B was number one, and Supercat remained in his shadow. But, once given the chance to work Kilimanjaro, Cat and the sound took off into the stratosphere and brought the sound along with him.

We also met George Phang for the first time that year. There was a dance with local Black Star sound featuring deejay Burro in a basement not far from our apartment. When we walked into the crowded, low ceiling, dark and smoky room, there he was in his Scottish tam, chatting with a Toronto local named Bigga Youth.

He was just starting his producing career working with Jam-Can Records, a label that had started to handle George's product. The label was run out of Pete Weston's Micron Record shop on St. Clair Avenue West in Toronto by two of the associates there, Everett and Darcell. And he was in Toronto with Little John, Toyan and Echo Minott, three artists he was currently working with.

Brigadier Jerry happened to be in town for a dance, along with Ilawe, his selector from Jah Love Muzik in Jamaica. Darcell, who owned and operated the local Black Star Sound, held a special party in his mother's tiny basement to celebrate Brigi's Birthday, and Phang's crew came along to perform.

At the time, Brigi was still a mysterious unknown, the man who never recorded and of whom no one had seen photos. He was still heavily guarded by his Twelve Tribes associates who protected him from people like us, in the "press," who might want an interview but not be willing to pay.

To see Brigi up close (the basement was VERY small) was an awe-inspiring event. He was the master at the time. No one was better than Brigadier in a dance live. He was a deejay virtuoso, a true master of the art. But, wherever he walked, his Twelve Tribes handlers preceded him, and they were not a friendly crew. Whenever we asked, Brigadier would happily consent to do an interview, and one of the Twelve Tribes would nix the idea in a rather hostile manner. No money upfront, no talk.

Ilawe, his selector and drummer with the Twelve Tribes band, the last I heard, was still holding out for money to do a full interview. It's a shame because his legacy will fade away with him, and he will be forgotten in the complex and under-documented annals of reggae music.

The subject of cash for interviews didn't come up often. But when it did, it was usually impervious to all logical arguments. Eekamouse once explained on the phone in a roundabout fashion that I should be paying him because I could make a lot of money using his name. People even sited autobiographies written by former presidents to illustrate just how much could be earned on a name. Junjo once suggested that he would sell his autobiography (if he were ever to write one) for $2 million.

I tried explaining to Eekamouse (in good humor) that in publishing an article about him, I would be giving him free publicity. So, really, he should be paying me. He laughed, but he wasn't convinced

Reggae Quarterly # 5 Sly and Robbie special

Josie and Charlie together in Toronto

Josie was more comfortable by the second time he came to Toronto and ready to show Charlie the ropes. They were here for some Christmas dances and Josie, especially, requested a photo of him with snow. A few days later, I went up to the Conroy Hotel to give Josie and Charlie the photos, but when I arrived, I was told they had gone out with the promoter, Tubby, to get some food. So I went back downtown with Maxine and Melody, the girlfriends who had come with them to Toronto, to accompany them on a shopping expedition. George dropped us off at Honest Ed's were Maxine picked up some glass candle holders, bowls, baby shoes and a big bag of cashew nuts. After a stop at Roan Pee for fish dinner and a game of Pacman, we all returned to the hotel.

A couple of hours later and were sitting in the room (still waiting for Josie and Charlie to show), looking at pictures of Melody's two children, when George, another person involved with the show, got a call from Tubby, the promoter. The call seemed to amuse him, but after hanging up, he suddenly turned and herded us all downstairs where Tubby was waiting in the lobby in a very silly mood. He told us he had left Josie and Charlie at Romey's shop. Then he and George had a few words in private, and Tubby practically pushed us into his car and drove off without telling us where we were going. Maxine wanted to go back upstairs to get her jacket, but George insisted on leaving right away explaining, lamely, that Tubby had won $10 with his lottery ticket, and they had to go cash it right away so they could buy more beer.

So we drove off to the closest variety store, and Tubby left the car to claim his winnings. While he was gone, the two girls put their heads together and figured out the plot. Josie and Charlie must have been there all along, hiding in the lounge with a couple of girls, ready to dash up to the rooms the moment Maxine and Melody could be removed. By the time Tubby got back, the two women were seething.

The next day, Dave asked Charlie if he had gotten in trouble the night before. Charlie just chuckled ruefully and admitted that he had indeed. But didn't seem too ruffled by it.

All four -Josie. Charlie and girlfriends - made an appearance at Dave's radio show the next night, Josie and Charlie deejaying live, just as easy and comfortable as if they were in any Stur-Gav session. Since Josie had been in RQ # 4, Charlie went into # 5 and U Roy, their mentor and owner of Stur-Gav sound, went into # 6.

Sly and Robbie

At the beginning of 1985, rhythm duo drummer Sly Dunbar and bassist Robbie Shakespeare were still 'carrying the swing". Who better deserved to be on the cover of RQ#5? I was lucky enough to catch them preparing for a session in Channel One, the studio that was leading the change into a more dancehall friendly commercial output. Inside the studio, Sly showed off the latest in drum set technology, the Syndrum, which, while not yet fully programmable, had some technical capabilities that went beyond manual drumming.

The great hit-making backing bands of the early 1980s in reggae were Sly and Robbie and The Roots Radics. While Sly and Robbie had been on the scene for years playing in studio bands like the Revolutionaries and the Aggravators, their style had dropped out of fashion.

At first, the Radics were a new formation containing several veteran players along with some fresher faces but eventually coalesced into the solid team of Style Scott on drums. Flabba Holt on bass, Steely on keyboards, Bongo Herman playing percussion, Dwight and both Pinkney and Bingy Bunny on guitar.

Between 1980 and 1984, the Root Radics sound ruled. Their sound was less dense than those of the roots era bands. The sparser, spacier Radics rhythm tracks backed all the hit-maker vocalists from Barrington Levy to Yellowman. A lot of this boost for the Radics came from producer Junjo Lawes who began using a pick-up form of these musicians for his first recordings. And the sound took off.

Junjo Lawes quickly became the top producer. But his Volcano sound system was made up of wild, ragamuffin deejays, the most disordered group of artists performing in Jamaica at the time. So it wasn't long before cracks began to form.

Hanging out in their headquarters at Myrie Ave., off Oakland Ave, close to Spanish Town Road, the crew would wait for something to happen. Like the sudden arrival of a soldier truck with several uniformed police along for the ride. As if on cue, as the truck stopped in from of the headquarters, the crew sprang into action. Lui Lepke grabbed a semi-automatic rifle off one of the soldiers and posed with it, "For the cover of my album, “Guman Move!" he announced gleefully, clutching the long gun close to his chest and standing tall.

In a flash, the crew surrounded the truck. Junjo donned a borrowed helmet and posed in the back of the truck with his packaged toothbrush (to clean his Clark's? We'll never know). Gillipriest called me over to take some shots as the crew, in all their exuberance, posed and modeled while the soldier and police smiled patiently. When they were gone, Junjo showed me his key chain that had a charm on it – a small gold pistol, and proceeded to bounce around the street outside the HQ aiming it at people and calling out "Bo! Bo Bo!"

Junjo was always on the go, darting about from the studio to the dub-cutting room to the distributors. He ran all-night sessions in the studio where more than a dozen rhythm tracks were laid down, and several singers and deejays voiced. The musicians remember these nights as exhausting marathons. But Junjo had no mercy. He was driven and determined to get ahead. His rumored use of strong-arm tactics, including kidnapping artists to extract a studio session, left both fear and resentment in the community. But he was making hit after hit. He was too hot to stop.

But the instability of the organization began to take its toll. Tempted by the city lights up north, many artists began spending more and more time in New York and Miami. Until they didn't come back. Junjo eventually left, too. In 1985 he made Queens his new command post. But it's hard to make reggae from abroad, and eventually, his empire was taken over by new producers. And a change in the backing band.

This time around, Sly and Robbie appeared with a more sophisticated sound. Their work with newcomer Ini Kamouze showed the world how far they had come in understanding the international direction reggae was taking.

And with the rise of Sly and Robbie, came producer George Phang, a close friend of Robbie. Phang used Sly and Robbie's talents optimally, producing a string of hits - both for fresh faces like Half Pint, as well as for established artists like Barrington Levy and Little John (not to mention top fliers like Yellowman and Sugar Minott).

1985 "Sleng Teng" - the big change

After long delays and a couple of unscheduled stops, we landed in Kingston at 6:15 am as the sun was rising. The flight, originally scheduled to leave Toronto at 9:45 am, finally took off at 10:30 at night and then made two unscheduled stops – one in Philadelphia and the other in Montego Bay. When we finally reached the Crawford's, we fell asleep. When we woke up, the water was locked off. A new system of water rationing was in place, meaning water was only available for certain hours each day.

It was mid- January and still the newspapers were discussing the explosion at Premier plaza. On Christmas Eve, when the plaza was full of families – parents and young children- picking up gifts, the helium cylinder that was being using to blow up balloon exploded. Several people were killed, and many more severely maimed. It turned out the cylinder had not been filed with helium after all, but with a hydrochloric acid-based gas. The operators had been chased out of Half Way Tree earlier because of the smell the gas was producing, so they set up at Premier Plaza. The tank overheated in the sun.

Once again, Jamaica was bathed in that aura of surreal terror I often felt in the pit of my stomach. Like the time we ran into a Youth Promotion deejay walking a friend and fellow toaster named Reagan to the police station. He had just killed his sister by stabbing her through the eye with a steel rod. "She died from the pain," Blacka T told us. And now he was accompanying Reagan to the station to turn himself in.

At first, when we ventured out onto the hot Kingston streets, it seemed that nothing had changed. The same people were on the corner. The water still locked off every night around midnight. But, people were saying that the country was more 'mashed up' than ever. Times were getting even harder still. Things were, indeed, changing, although, in the typical Jamaica way, people just went on with their lives the same as always, as best they could.

Our first sign that things were changing was Chancery Lane. Gregory's African Museum store was closed – temporarily, they claimed. His absence alone sucked half the life out of the usually bustling lane.

We went to Sonic Sounds, but Neville Lee was still in England, not at his usual post, at his desk overseeing the production and distribution of one of Kingston's most popular and prestigious record labels

So, we went on to Music Works where Gussie was in his studio, not exactly working but laughing and gossiping about how an engineer for the Barry G show had been caught kissing someone in Sparrow's band.

Our next stop, Channel One, looked equally deserted. The engineers and staff were still waiting for Jojo Hookim to come from New York with the parts they needed for the studio equipment. For three weeks they had been waiting

During the lull in activity, Chineyman and Goldie were there with a group called Midnight Riders they were working with at the time. But the regular crowd of 'loafters' was gone. The truth is, the record industry was in a slump. LPs were retailing for $24 Jamaican and 45s for $5.50. Garth, Pablo's brother, said producers wanted to boycott all the pressing plants (except for Tuff Gong, which had then moved to the building formerly owned by Federal Records) to get the prices rolled back. Then Sleng Teng hit.

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The big clash

The story of Wayne Smith's game-changing hit has been told elsewhere. The song came at a moment when change was both needed and inevitable. The early 80s dancehall style had run its course. People where tired of the same rhythms repeated endlessly with new vocalists who often performed almost the same lyrics, with minor changes. How many versions of Boneman Connection need to be recorded before the public fatigues? “Sleng Teng” introduced a new paradigm to music production and made everything new and fun again.

“Sleng Teng” had such a fresh, infectious sound that people took to it immediately. Compared to the 'digital' style, the older tunes sounded dull, lifeless, flat. The reggae scene was waiting for the opportunity to renew its self. And here it was.

Reggae, at the midpoint of the ‘80s, was stale. Producers had been wildly and wantonly re-processing the same old rhythms that had been created in the late '60s, in the heady days of rock steady. Rhythms like “Hip Hug”, “Real Rock”, “No No No”, “Mad Mad Mad”, “Death in the Arena”, “Answer”.producers cranked out endless versions of the same music.

The use of new instruments interrupted the cycle and unleashed creativity. The keyboard and drum machine combination allowed new rhythms to be made easily and facilitated the entrance of new blood into the business. The low-budget aspect of the set up let in amateurs, and that gave the music a chance to absorb new influences. Not that the old rhythms weren’t used, but they slowly faded away as Jamaicans developed a new musical vocabulary.

And now the studios had a brand new collection of rhythms to voice over. Wayne Smith's mega-hit “Sleng Teng” had taken over the territory, and “digital” style riddims had made everything musical that came before, obsolete.

The Digital “computer” sound was already spreading fast in Jamaica, but then an event occurred that carried the sound around the world. David Rodigan came to town.

David Rodigan was the host of Capital Radio's program Reggae Rockers, the most popular and influential reggae show in the UK and a devoted fan of the music.

A true believer in the power of reggae music and an expert in the field, Rodigan had been participating in a series of radio clashes with wildly popular Jamaican radio host Barry G. Head-to-head, just the two of them in locked sonic battle, the disc jockeys would challenge each other in marathon on-air battles, pitting dubplate against dubplate, just like a real sound system clash. And now, 1985, Rodigan was back for another round.

Right off the bat, each radio jock needed exclusive records for the disc jockey competition. Rodigan arrived in Jamaica and began searching out talent and cutting sides. Easy to find. Every little singer wanted his voice on national radio - really international radio as each clash would be broadcast in the UK as well. And every producer wanted his label represented. King Jammy, Black Scorpio, Gussie’s Music Works - singers were lining up waiting to get inside and voice a ‘special’, a version of a popular song with the lyrics altered to boost up one of the two jocks.

As Rodigan recalls in his book, Rodigan: My Life in Reggae (Constable, 2017), the first half-hour of the clash was pure “Sleng Teng rhythm”, special after special voiced over the scorching rhythm. And after that, the "digital" hits kept on coming.

The first generation of ‘digital’ rhythms had just been created in Jammy's bedroom studio in Waterhouse, and that's where the action was bubbling up. The artists had migrated from downtown streets and studios to Waterhouse, the area where the streets bore names of Caribbean islands, and the residents stayed home after dark.

We were hanging around the studio one day when a young, awkward but enthusiastic youth named Tenorsaw was just voicing a lyric about "how water walk go a pumpkin belly" over the sparse, repetitive “Sleng Teng” rhythms track. Tenorsaw's intensity was riveting to watch. With his face contorting, and his hands flying, he intoned his now-classic lyrics with a grim determination. That style became emblematic of the new vocals that meshed so well with the digital rhythms.

Everything gone Digital

While cows and chickens wandered along West Bay Farm Road, King Jammy was in his studio, breaking new musical ground for reggae.

The most obvious sign of the change Jamaica was undergoing in mid-decade was the music. Reggae had taken a step closer to North American music by falling in love with pre-programmable instruments like keyboards and drums. Although it was a controversial transition, still heavily resisted by many in the industry and by fans of roots music around the world, the shift to digital helped reggae music to move forward.

The tide had shifted completely. The small pink room that had previously served as a bedroom was the hottest place in town. Producers no longer needed a space big enough for a piano and a full set of drums. They could do everything required to create a complete rhythm track with just one keyboard. Space was no longer a factor.

That one instrument could produce not only the sounds of the piano, the bass, the guitar, the organ, and all the horns; it could also produce a beat. This digital* means of producing backing tracks became the great equalizer. Producers with just a spare room as working space, no longer needed to book time in the big studios like Channel One and Tuff Gong just to lay down a rhythm track

**It wasn't really "digital" in terms of being computer generated. It was merely pre-programmable and electronic. There was no manual percussion or drum set, no live saxophone or trombone. The beat was looped in the keyboard after being set for tempo etc. The other sounds were added by samples in the keyboard and played on the keys like a piano. The music later became really digitalized when computer mixing and editing programs came along.*

The big showdown between Barry G and eminent David Rodigan came just at the right time. This international battle, using the new style of music as a weapon, gave the “digital” sound maximum exposure right at the start. The "digital" sound spread rapidly, conquering musical territory around the world. I can't recall who officially "won" the clash, but it was small Jamaican

producers who came out ahead. Now they could control their own production, from laying down the backing track to cutting the dubs.

June 1985

What made the music change so suddenly and so drastically? What motivated a switch so sweeping that producers tossed aside hundreds of old backing tracks that had been carefully, and at significant cost, laid down in the studio?

One of the main factors was the growing US influence. Jamaica had long taken its cue from American popular music, covering country, Motown and R&B, even pop songs like “Crimson and Clover”. There was a slight time lag, but Jamaica often followed the US lead.

But something else new on the US scene that had a profound effect on the way music was presented and consumed – the music video. With the advent of satellite TV, American programs that showed music videos began to infiltrate Jamaican households.

Jamaicans have always been big movie fans, participating in screenings in a much more interactive way than we do in the US and Canada. And movies have always had an impact on the Jamaican imagination, from the spaghetti westerns that gave name to so many deejays like Clint Eastwood, Ringo and Lee Van Cliff, to the gangster films that provided names like Dennis Alcapone and Dillinger.

At first, VHS machines allowed people to record these shows and pass them around. In those years, when we came to Jamaica, we carried copies of popular films like *Rambo* for George Phang. Jamaicans were crazy to get the latest videos.

Then came the satellite dish with MTV, where Jamaicans could catch all the latest rap and R&B music videos. George Phang was one of the first to extend the idea to reggae, making videos to accompany his productions of Josie Wales' “Undercover Lover” and Freddy MacGregor's “Don't Hurt my Feelings”. At the time, very few music videos existed in Jamaica. But the trend was starting to grow. Some early experimentation came from artists like Dignitary Stylish with “Jah Send Me Come”, Tiger’s “No Wanga Gut”, Lt Stitchie's, “Natty Dread”, along with several from General Trees.

A new generation was coming up, absorbing the influences of US music and fashions. Most significantly, they were consuming Michael Jackson, who was loved like no one else in Jamaica. Jamaican youth patterned themselves on him completely, from his clothes to his hair. (Already, many artists had shed their dreadlocks and opted for the Michael Jackson inspired Gheri Curl look.) His music was known to everyone and often covered by reggae artists. Michael Jackson ruled the '80s, and when he passed away, Jamaica went into mourning.

As Ivor Nugent wrote in the KC Times, "The untimely passing of Michael Jackson has left those of us who grew up in the 1960s and 1970s teary-eyed and sad. As children and teenagers, we knew all the songs 'by heart' as we sang (or spoke the words) with our girlfriends who loved the Jacksons to death. The bold amongst us had our glove and as rudeboys we already had our 'gunmouth' pants. So we were in style influenced by Michael Jackson and the Jackson Five!!!"*

Ivor Nugent http://www.kcobaatl.org/2009/Jun/Article17.html The KC Times, newsletter of Kingston College, Atlanta, Georgia

Like a true Jamaican superstar, Jackson began his career singing as a child-like Delroy Wilson, Dennis Brown, Yammy Bolo. Jamaicans were drawn to that high, sweet sound and loved their singers young and fresh. Little John and Tristan Palma first made it because of their youth.

Even today, reggae is rife with Jackson's influences. Covers of his greatest hits are still recorded (like "Human Nature" by Tarrus Riley in 2008), and his dances and style still resonate in videos like Tommy Lee's "Uncle Demon", a kind of gothic dancehall that owes much to *Thriller*.*

**Tommy Lee admitted to having been influenced by Jackson for this song in an interview in the Jamaican Starhttp://jamaica-star.com/thestar/20120831/ent/ent1.html*

Foreign Mind

And just what did this interest in US culture and music get Jamaicans? It got them "foreign mind" - at least according to the lyrics of several popular songs. While having a foreign mind remained an accepted (and even condoned) condition of upper-class Jamaicans, in the dancehall it became a stigma.

Junior Reid expressed it well. In his popular 45 "The Original Foreign Mind" released 1985, he sang, "When some people go a foreign they see they never see before and forget all about their bredren in Jamdown living so poor." So true. The lure of other lands was always present, but now even more so as people watched music videos from the US and saw rappers dripping gold chains, surrounded by scantily dressed women.

By mid-decade, any entertainer who could manage to find a way, legal or otherwise, emigrated to "foreign," usually Miami, New York, London or Toronto. They went because they were "foreign mind" and cared more about status than heritage.

This condition of "foreign mind" meant turning your back on your roots, your culture. It meant valuing anything that came from afar over that which was available at home. Not to imply that this phenomenon was somehow uniquely Jamaica. Every country romanticizes inaccessible. In the '60s, American kids were devouring the British invasion bands, all of whom where covering US R&B tunes and imitating the blues.

But Jamaica, as a former colony, had a more complicated relationship with "foreign.""*. Past generations had looked to England to determine a model of good taste. Now, in the mid-80s, with US culture pouring into Jamaican homes via satellite TV, music videos, and copies of VHS movies, all things American replaced all things British as the standard. Like a re-colonization, but this time the colonizer was being invited in with enthusiasm.

**Jamaicans often use the word foreign to mean abroad as in "He's gone a foreign"*

The problem was that Jamaicans, in Jamaica, were still unsure about their own culture. Even into the ‘80s, foreign music played on the two radio stations – country and western, pop, classical, soul. In terms of careers, being a dancehall deejay was considered just a stepping stone to an eventual, more legitimate stage career. Dancehall work was seen as the lowest rung on the entertainment ladder. So, many deejays, after enjoying a hit or two, attempted to distance themselves s from live session work and do stage shows only.

The problem was, you couldn't leave the sound system scene altogether. After a visit abroad on a tour with a band, artists would come back to Jamaica and proclaim loftily that they were only doing stage shows. But their resolve didn't last.

Sound system work was the only way to make a consistent wage and not even a great one at that. In the ‘80s, stage shows were reserved for the more established artists like Jimmy Cliff, Toot and the Maytals, Judy Mowatt, Chalice. But, the sounds were playing seven days a week, so there was always work if you wanted it. So, most artists came back to the sounds.

Performing consistently on a sound was the only way to maintain your vibe. Too long away from the live mic work and an artist grew 'soft', no longer a hit-maker, because he no longer caught the latest trends as they were happening. And dancehall was all about being on top of the quickly changing styles – of wearing the right shoes, sporting the newest “bling”, using the right slang, perfecting the latest dance moves, knowing the lyrics that were circulating. Whether it was all the 'moves' – shoulder move, body move, money move, or the “connections” – bone-man connection, sound system connection, parish connections>To keep his street cred, a performer had to know the “runnings”. The scene was highly competitive and very fickle. Someone left for a tour and by the time he came back, someone had taken his place at the top. Woe to the performers who got “foreign mind” too early in their careers.

Yet, they went. Artists still dreamed of leaving Jamaica.

New York

In between our twice-yearly trips to Jamaica, we would spend a few days in NY visiting the Jamaican record shops in Brooklyn and Queens

Our two main stops were Jah Life's shop in Brooklyn and VP in Queens. The two record outlets could hardly have been more different. Jah Life's place had a Rasta based, laid back, ganja fueled, casual feel to it. When Jah Life needed to run out and pick up some paper towels for the shop, he just opened the till and grabbed a few bills. Tending the counter would be either future hit-maker Scion Sahay Success or Life's business partner Percy Chin. But Jah Life was the one who ferried the artists to the studio and oversaw the production.

VP, on the other hand, was strictly business, and the Chin's (mother Miss Pat and son Chris) strictly discouraged loafters*, although some artist or another was always close by to chat and show us around. Just a few doors down, Clive Chin ran a Jamaican food joint where we could eat and talk while we waited for one of the Chins to gather the funds we had come to collect for the issues if Reggae Quarterly they had sold since out last visit

- *Loafters - people who loiter, or “loaf” in a public area*

VP always paid. That wasn't the problem. It just took time. So we waited and chatted with Clive about his days in the music business in the 70s in Randy's record shop on North Parade and his work with Augustus Pablo on the hit, Java.

Mainly we hung out with Jah Life, joining him as he drove to Queens to visit his friend and business partner Junjo Lawes who had followed the call northwards and lived with his wife and two young children in a small apartment in Queens.

One afternoon, we had the opportunity to tag along as Jah Life carried Scion Sashay Success, his new wonder boy, to HFC studio owner and engineer Phillip Smart's radio program at New York University. We sat and listened to the music and chatted with Phillip while Jah Life tried to pick up every girl who passed by. That particular night was oldies night, so Phillip wasn't announcing all the names of the songs. He was playing discs with blank, white label 45s like the ones found all around Jamaica. The discs were intended for sound system play, so the labels were hidden from the prying eyes of competing sound systems – a shame because so much great music remains unidentified.

In the earlier part of the decade, record shop owners in the boroughs spent their days in front of the store chatting with people who stopped their cars to hail up the boss or sitting inside talking on the phone. But by mid-decade, the casual ambiance had turned.

Fresh sources were injecting money into the scene. To cover the tracks of the new money coming in, business owners launched music operations in the US. The reggae record business offered many possibilities for laundering funds.

We went to see a producer in New York who was new to the scene and having some success with his records. After entering the store, we were lead to a back room, hung with internal security cameras, where we found the owner sitting behind a broad desk stacked with piles of US bills. An attractive young woman perched on the edge.

The owner set aside his calculator for a while to chat with us. All the while, the light on the ceiling camera glowed red as it pointed in our direction. Outside, just down the street, a down-and-out deejay peddled various drugs. The music business wasn't just about music anymore, at least not in New York. Even in Toronto, one popular record shop had opened a crack-smoking club in the basement.

Youth Promotion Tour Toronto

In 1985, Sashy Nice's brother, promoter Blue, decided, with a bit of lobbying from us, to bring the Youth Promotion crew to Toronto for a series of Christmas season dances.

On the phone with us before the trip, Blacka T said he has two bottles of rum for us. But by the time we got to the hotel the next day, there was only one. When we arrived, a bevy of girls was already waiting for the crew's arrival. In no time, Dona P was sitting comfortably on the couch with a girl in his arms sipping his little bottle of airplane Tia Maria.

That next night, at the first dance, the Concert Hall was rammed. Sugar was singing his most soulful gospel lyrics and tearing the place down. But it seemed the party continued in the hotel,

and the next day, the crew was on the street. Instead of spending the day shopping, according to the original plan, the crew spent their afternoon moving the equipment and records to new digs.

Blue or Dave or me- each of us took turns going back and forth with the crew to the hotel, the sound checks, the meals. But the rest of the time, local friends came around and kept the crew entertained. Whenever I went by the hotel, Daddy Ants would ask what I had brought for him and look dejected when I said, “nothing”. Finally, I got frustrated and when he asked again and reached in my purse to see what I had. All I could find was a bag of multi-colored jelly beans, so I gave it to him. He looked at it and asked me, "Is it sweeties?" I nodded, and he took them happily looking content – at least for the moment. When Dave walked in a minute later, he asked Dave what he had brought for him.

A friend of Blue's came to the hotel at 9:30 to drive us all to the venue. Along the way, the crew grunted and complained about the music on the radio. One complained, "I used to hear that song all the time when I was in Jail." Blue stopped at the hotel ice machine and grabbed eight bags for his “Sleng Teng” punch he was planning to sell at the bar.

We took a slight detour to Dave’s program on CKLN radio, where the crew filled the tiny booth, deejaying and singing live while Pleasure mixed energetically at the controls. Smoke poured out of every crevice, creating a dense fog in the booth.

Back at the Concert Hall for the show, Blacka T asked permission to “sleep out” if he found a girl. It was granted.

The next morning I phoned them at the hotel. Same story. "We need help!” Pleasure pleaded on the phone. By the time I got there, the crew was gone, and all the equipment was out in the hall with a sleeping Daddy Ants on watch. Eventually, we got everyone to the Conroy – a decidedly more downscale hotel, with pealing wall-paper and a broken black and white TV. (Pleasure immediately took it to another room and switched it for one that worked)

But even there, the crew fared no better. Just as we arrived, a group of determined-looking men came down the corridor, wearing sweater vests and ties and flashing their badges. So we had to wake everyone up. The crew and all the loafters came pouring out of the rooms carrying garbage bags of clothes, records and equipment outside. The final destination was the North American hotel on the Lakeshore where the crew had a three-bedroom house to themselves

The last show was somewhat uninspired. The crew was going to get on the plane for home immediately afterward. Pleasure had his ticket in is shirt pocket, guarding it carefully. Dona P had intended to stay, but at the last minute changed his mind and left with the rest. Everyone was tired and cold and ready to go back to the warmth and sunshine. So, a wearily but happy crew loaded up the vans at the end of the show, with all the equipment, the records, the luggage, and all the bags of presents friends and fans had given them – including still wrapped, boxed Christmas presents. The 8:10 am flight from Toronto stopped over in Miami and then flew straight to Kingston. The next time we saw the crew, they were comfortable in Sugar's Youth Promotion Headquarters, and we were there to plan our wedding.

1986 February

The Wedding

Sugar Minot, ever the romantic, had always suggested that we get married. So, in 1986, we decided it was about time. And we wanted to tie the knot at a Youth Promotion session.

Sugar's mother took us down to meet her pastor, Bishop Reid, on Maxfield Avenue. To my surprise, he didn't blink an eye on hearing the request and agreed to come to 1 Robert Crescent and marry us at Sugar's house.

The afternoon of the wedding, the sound set was up early in the yard. Bishop Reid came by, and we all went into the front room, the room just inside the door. There we signed the documents, with Sugar and his brother Pleasure as witnesses. Colorman cracked open a bottle of the apple wine he had picked up for the occasion, and Sugar approached with something in his hand. "It's just some birds," he said shyly as he handed me a small package. A wedding gift! A white doily, the type every good Jamaica household has lining the top of the "buffet". The design was ten chickens with red crests and yellow beaks. I still have it over thirty years later, something I will always treasure.

Then Major Stitch cranked up the sounds touching down with Michael Prophet's Here Comes the Bride and Marcia Griffith's "Truly". Many friends and entertainers drifted in throughout the night, including an unfamiliar man who balanced his tiny daughter in his hand and raised her in the air. Sugar, or someone in YP, suggested I give my camera to a gentleman named Teacher and let him take pictures all night. In exchange for the service, I gave him several rolls of film and some batteries. When I had the images developed, every single one was out of focus. The only salvageable images were the few I had taken myself and some we had taken earlier of the actual ceremony with one of the "wedding party' doing the honors. Apparently, Teacher didn't know that the camera had to be manually focused and refocused for new each shot. But the images are good enough to identify who was there (and how much fun we were all having), so each image is a memory, however hazy and indistinct.

Dave and I left relatively early, but the dance went on late into the morning. The next day, Bingy Jean, weed man and one of Sugar's confidants, told us we had done something good. I was puzzled because I had never thought about getting married as anything other than something that affected us personally. But Jean explained that we were setting an example, a much-needed model in Kingston where relationships tend to temporary and casual, at least for the men. And the women are all too often left single and unsupported through pregnancies and child-rearing.

U Roy

Cockburn Penn was a new part of town for us. All around, the streets were named for birds: Woodpecker Avenue, Swallow Road, Canary Ave, Pelican Parade, Booby Drive. So Dave and I headed out to Cling Cling* Ave to locate U Roy and the crew of Stur-Gav sound.

**better known as the Greater Antilles grackle*

U Roy, whose memory was already clouded by the ganja he had smoked so heavily all his life, retained only a vague memory of having met us before. However, the photos I took of him at Skateland in 1984 were framed on and hung on his wall.

As easy and loose one to one as he was in his toasting style, U Roy welcomed us to his neighborhood and took us around to the Stur-Gav corner. There they all were – the Stur-Gav crew in fine style. Peekins (who strung up the sound), U-Roy's son, Buzzy (an apprentice}. Fred, Monkey. U Roy leaned back against the wall as Josie Wales entertained the crowd doing wheelies on his bicycle. We talked Willie into running off some Stur-Gav dance cassettes for us as we sat down to interview Daddy Roy.

Phillip Fraser, because of his newfound popularity via dubplates on Stur-Gav sound, singer Phillip Fraser Had made a great comeback. Josie Wales' best lyrics were reserved for Phillip Fraser songs. There was just some kind of creative chemistry between them. Willie would play "Please Stay", "Never Let Go", "Shining Star", "When I Run Out", "Quiet Place", and Josie would come in, and sparks would fly. He was hot as a live wire.

Sometimes Phillip would drop by to sing live and direct. His voice was such a staple of Stur-Gav, it would have been an oversight not to seek him out for an interview in the magazine featuring U-Roy and company.

Phillip lived in a different part of town, close to Sugar Minott and Youth Promotion. His home territory was Delamere Ave., also home neighborhood to Tristan Palma, Ashanti Waugh and Tony Tuff.

Delamere Ave runs off Waltham Park Road, where Sugar had his record outlet for a few years and connects to Maxfield just above Rousseau Road, where Sonic Sounds was headquartered. In the late '70s, the Soul Syndicate band moved into the neighborhood and brought with it artists from the Freedom sounds stable. Delamere Ave had long been a hotbed of musical expression and creativity. It was there on Delamere Ave that Coxsone Dodd spotted the African Brothers rehearing. In the '80s the area became the headquarters for the Black Solidarity label with Ossie Thomas and Tristan Palma.

At the time, the new sensation from the area was Ashanti Waugh with his hit "Crime Act"(1986 Black Solidarity). The lyrics lamented life under the notorious decree referred to as the Suppression of Crime Act. This law allowed the police and military to enter and search homes in entire neighborhoods, looking for firearms, without any kind of court order or warrant.

While we were visiting Tristan Palma, Tony Tuff rode up on his bike with an orange plastic cap covering the processing of his new Jeri Curl do.

As always, we would end up back at Jammy's because Waterhouse was still the central musical hub. King Jammy had struck gold with the counterintuitive success of his "digital" hit "Sleng Teng". Young musicians and artists were flooding the studio every day, hoping to get an audition. Young unknowns like Supermajor, Superblack, Sammy Jeggae, Sashon, Robbie Roberts and Woody Noble were waiting to cut their first side with the King. The studio yard, now extended into the yard next door, was broader, more spacious, but way more packed with people, equipment, random bicycles and motorcycles, giving the house a constant buzz of activity within a quiet residential neighborhood. The only shop around was the "i-tal" shed down by the bus turn around on Bay Farm Road that sold warm stouts and cold box juice.

Regulars Echo Minott and his inseparable sparring partner General Leon walked us over to nearby Marvely (where Echo Minott lived) and on to Drewsland to Black Scorpio sound's headquarters, just off Moylines Road. The yard was paved and big enough to hold a small neighborhood dance. General Trees took us by his home, and over to the little shack he shared with another cobbler. Trees was a shoemaker by profession. He let me choose among his wares, and I selected a simple pair of leather thong sandals. We sat a while at his home as Trees cut up some weed, rolled the biggest spliff I have seen, and vanished in a puff of smoke.

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June 1986

"It was the 6th of the 6th 1986 when the waters from the mountains made a visit"

In the spring of 1986, Jamaica was underwater after two and a half weeks of solid rain. We arrived on the 6th of the 6th, 1986, just like Cocoa Tea sings in his ode to the inundation.

The country was still in a state of confusion and disarray. Everyone had to boil the tap water to drink it. Ganja was starting to run short in the city. The roads going out to Ewarton had been torn apart by the force of the water, reduced to stones, dust and puddles. So local city entrepreneurs couldn't drive out and pick up a fresh supply. Jah Bull could hardly conceal his disgust and disappointment. His house had been flooded, and the government sent some aid workers to the village to help the displaced. What did the workers do? "Them give us some buns."

Yabby You

Yabby You dropped by the hotel with Willi Williams one evening soon after our arrival. After making himself comfortable on the sofa, he explained how he had saved his village during the recent floods by being righteous because, as in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, God won't destroy a village if there is one righteous person there.

As the time went by, Yabby continued to ramble on, covering many topics. He told us about suffering from juvenile arthritis and how they wanted to experiment on him with new drugs, like how they kept him on steroids for years, He couldn't walk and his heart was too small. He described meeting singer Michael Prophet who came to his yard and spent a year learning from him. He reminisced about the first time a youthful Michael Prophet came to see him. Michael showed Yabby his shoes – how they looked nice and polished on top. But as he lifted his foot, Yabby could see they were full of holes on the bottom. So Yabby realized Michael was suffering and took him in.

As the sky got darker, Yabby moved on to more abstract topics, like his psychic abilities, about instances in which he had a feeling not to go and meet a certain person and found out later that person hadn't shown up. Or how he realized you can mentally tune out temptations and not allow other people to affect you. He said he knew "duppies" (ghosts) didn't exist because he had spent

the night in the cemetery as a child. In a couple of controversial stands, he told us how he resented Marcus Garvey for sinking poor people's money in the Black Star Liner and felt Bob Marley had sold himself to the devil – first, by being false to his wife by marrying "the prettiest women in the world," and then by fooling the people when, at the One Love Peace Concert, he brought Seaga and Manley together and said it was peace*. But, Yabby insisted, there still wasn't peace.

**During the 1978 One Love Peace Concert, held to celebrate a peace treaty between the warring gangs of the JLP and PNP, Bob Marley brought the two leaders, Edward Seaga and Michael Manley, together on stage and encouraged them to hold join hands as a symbol of unity. Despite the optimistic beginning, the peace treaty fell apart shortly afterwards*

Willie, by this time, had wandered just outside the door, lay down on a ledge, and was fast asleep. We endured another hour or so, but finally had to wake up Willie and ask him to explain to his friend that we all needed sleep.

More Changes in Kingston

The next day when we wandered downtown, I was struck with a feeling of unfamiliarity, disorientation. Important record shops were gone - like Joe Gibbs on North Parade and Studio One. (Studio One owner Clement Dodd had permanently relocated to NY by then.) Gregory Isaacs had abandoned African Museum and was talking of opening a branch in New York. In the meantime, he set up a new shop in a mall near Half Way Tree where Dub poet Mutabaruka operated a health store on the second level. Gregory's uptown premises looked slick and clean with shiny new counters and racks. The ghetto was indeed moving uptown.

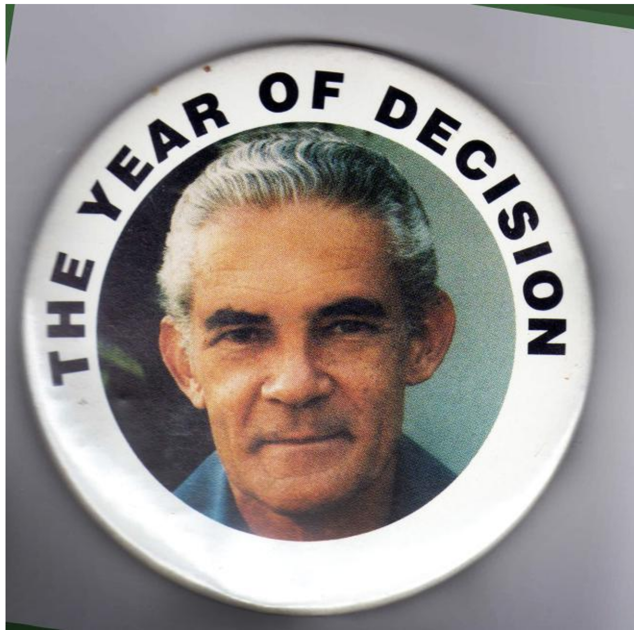
Being spring, it was time for the Jamaican festival songs competition. This year's competitors were playing on the radio relentlessly. Tinga Stewat's "Float a Come" (Calabash Records 1986) tried to capture the new "computer" style but sounded not only dreary but threatening {"Float a come, Float a come. Float a come ina the burning sun…") The winner was Stanley Turbine again with his soca infused "Dem a Squirm". But even Stanley Turbine's old-time folk sound couldn't match the popularity of the winner the following year when Roy Rayon, a frequent contestant, tore up with the place with "Give Thanks and Praise".

Written in collaboration with Ashley Grub of the Fab 5, "Give Thanks and Praise" celebrated 25 years since Jamaica's independence with an uplifting gospel number. But instead of exhorting the public to praise the Lord, the song encouraged Jamaicans to praise their great national heroes like Marcus Garvey, Bustamante, Paul Bogle and Bob Manley.

The song held such a grip on Jamaicans, both Rayon and The Fab 5 continued including it in shows for another 25 years, only changing "Give thanks and praises we are 25" to "Give thanks and praises we are still alive"- and it still sounds good.

Back on Molynes Rd., when we found him down at his corner, Tonic was wearing a button that said "Trenchtown Rock with Tony." Tony referred to the former housing minister under Michael Manley. Anthony Spalding, a fervent socialist who was said to be giving all the new housing he

created to PNP supporters. A local youth we had gotten to know, John Wayne (not the deejay), was sporting a huge Manley button. Election fever was in the air.



Parish level elections were held on July 29. These elections were seen, at the time, as a referendum on the six years of Seaga's neo-liberal style governance. The results showed the socialists gaining ground. The tide was turning. The next general election took place in 1989, and the PNP was victorious. But time had passed and Manley had retired. The head of the new government was Prime Minister P.J. Patterson

The Gleaner was still publishing the weekly schedule of the areas that will have “power maintenance” due to the floods. Flashlights, batteries and candles moved to the top of my “things to bring” list.

Dollars

It was true that Jamaicans certainly got up earlier than Americans and Canadians. At the first cock crow, you woke up. The second cockcrow signaled time to be out the door and heading for work or school, even after staying out late at a dance. Jamaicans didn't seem to take a siesta either, although you often came across someone asleep under challenging conditions. Brigadier Jerry was once happily in dreamland on a bench in Channel One while they were dubbing the horns over a song he had just recorded. And Horace Andy, who had earned the nickname 'Sleepy”, could be found dozing almost anywhere.

Most mornings, before heading out, we would stop by Mrs. Crawford's house and get some money changed. She needed foreign currency as Ucal was then undergoing treatment in Miami. The Crawfords, like so many in Jamaica, were always on the lookout for American dollars.

Since the 1950s, the Jamaican government-imposed foreign exchange controls had created a parallel market in foreign currency. Businesses were limited in the amount of money they could buy or send out of the country for purchases abroad. These limitations significantly hampered local businesses.

The need for US currency had an urgency that was palpable when we were there. Getting money out of the country was a constant concern. For a long time, foreign exchange accounts in Jamaican banks had not been permitted. Nor were Jamaicans allowed to hold accounts overseas. During the Manley years, the amount of money that could be taken out of the country was strictly limited - a situation that had sent business owners fleeing the country in the1970s. Studio owners, record producers, Jukebox rentals - almost anyone who owned a business needed a constant stream foreign exchange. But the Bank of Jamaica was using their US dollars (brought in by tourism and bauxite) to pay back the heavy foreign debt imposed by the IMF's loans.

That put U.S. and Canadian cash at a premium. The official exchange rate might be $1 Canadian to $2 Jamaican but on the black market, that same Canadian or US dollar would buy $4 or $5 Jamaican.

So, we regularly made the rounds – Neville Lee at Sonic Sounds, Jingles at Skateland, Eddie Lee at Dynamic. Most of the studios and record distributors were happy to help as they needed foreign dollars to buy parts and equipment along with the part they hid away for the day they could take their families out of Jamaica permanently.

Remittances and Barrels

One of the most significant boosts for the local economy came in the form of remittances sent from ex-pat Jamaicans all over the world.

Whereas a lot of Jamaicans had migrated to the UK after the Second World War, in the 1960s, they went to the US and Canada, filling entire neighborhoods in cities like New York, Toronto and Miami. As the young Jamaicans filtered in, they settled in the downtown core where they replaced the older immigrants who had come from eastern and southern Europe. Those earlier arrivals had long since moved out to new enclaves in the more prosperous suburbs.

Once a family member had managed to leave Jamaica and make it to "foreign" it wasn't as if he had escaped his responsibilities at home. Abroad is where the real work began. His or her new role became that of the provider for all. The migrant's family and friends at home now looked to that person for support to fill the gaps so many households faced – school fees, uniforms, medical care.

The family member who had settled abroad was expected to do two things regularly – send remittances and send barrels. Remittances, small sums sent frequently, comprise a considerable portion of the economic income of many countries all around the world.* The family member abroad would take his $40 or $50 (in those days) and go to an outlet of Western Union or Money Gram and buy a money transfer. He would then communicate with the recipient to give him or

her the transfer number, and, with that, the recipient could go to the local outlet at home and pick up the cash. All this had a price, and the transfer companies took their cut. But many Jamaican didn't maintain bank accounts at all, so they just paid the fees and considered the loss an inevitable part of the process.

**In 2002, remittances made up 16.7% of the GDP of Jamaica, a total of $ 1,333,000 in 2002 or $510 per capita,*
International Migrant Remittances and their Role in Development1, INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION OUTLOOK: SOPEMI 2006 EDITION – ISBN 92-64-03627-X – © OECD 2006 ISBN 92-64-03627-X, International Migration Outlook, SOPEMI 2006 Edition, © OECD 2006

In addition to remittances, people who had settled abroad sent "barrels." The barrel tradition has deep roots. The first barrels were sent by farmworkers around the time of the Second World War. The idea was to buy an empty barrel from a local retail location – grocery stores that sold Jamaican food carried them. You stuffed every inch of it and then added some more. Clothes, shoes, school supplies, tape recorders, movies, tins of food, tools, more clothes, candy, boxes of cereal, soap. Nothing you put in would go to waste in Jamaica

You could stuff the barrel full like this because the shipping cost would be the same. The barrels went by unit, not weight- one barrel, a single price. The only choice was air or freight. And that made the difference of where your relatives had to go to clear it in Jamaica- the airport or the wharf. The person who cleared the barrel paid the tariffs and tax and brought it home to be eagerly unpacked. Once empty, the barrels became furniture or just the city landscape, tuning up in offices, studios, homes and gardens.

Rumors

The music scene in Jamaica was changing, and with it, the local landscape. In Waterhouse, King Jammy had built a new kingdom around his wife Iris's original house. There was a real public bathroom, an office in the shed with a TV monitor, a gate with an intercom phone, and the crew had photo ID (Ghost Rider's said "transportation"). Iris was selling T-shirts – official Jammy shirts for $35 Jamaican – and she had a beauty salon in the front. Ganja smoking was no longer condoned.

By this time, the Kingston lifestyle had rubbed off on us. I loved the opportunity to spend my days sitting on street corners and in yards, idly chatting, passing the time. It felt so comfortable, so normal, to be around people all day. Not doing anything in particular. Just being around people. Watching them come and go. Greeting them as they passed by.

People seemed to accept us easily from the beginning, maybe because we came as a couple. We were non-threatening, and at the same time, an interesting phenomenon, something 'a little way different.' Apart from the initial suspicion by certain musicians we ran into early on, we rarely encountered any hostility. People were curious about us.

In a way, we served a useful purpose. We came in and relieved the monotony of days on end without even a marked change of seasons to indicate the forward movement of time. For the sound system crews, sitting out their days waiting for a booking for the sound, seeing us coming down the lane was a diversion, an invitation to laugh and joke around, pose for some photos, boast, let go some new lyrics. We were a good temporary distraction and, maybe, something to talk about later after we had gone.

Being around the same people day after day, and not doing much of anything, was enjoyable for a few weeks, but at least we could escape. It wasn't so easy for the people who remained. The enforced Idleness of the unemployed, combined with the crowded, confined living conditions, lead to the abundance of rumors. People talked about other people, and stories spread mouth to mouth among the small, close communities. Rumors were ubiquitous in Jamaica. That's why so many songs mention them.

People would tell you, in voices of deep concern, that (for example) Tristan Palma had been robbed on his way home from a dance last night. Or that Michael Palmer was losing his voice. Peter Chemist was losing his eyesight – his nose had been broken when a girl hit him there, and his eyes were sinking back into his head. Talouse got his arm chopped off by badmen in his area (the truth: he had a small cut). Or that such and such a producer had turned laborite…one particular artist had been caught carrying ganja into the UK… a studio owner was keeping a cassette deck hidden under the board and taping the music when people came to cut dubplates and then using it himself. A new producer was in hiding after killing his baby mother. Someone else was caught with cocaine and put in jail. A well-known artist had fixed a horse race. Another artist crashed on his motorcycle and was in the hospital – but this last one was generally true. An unbelievable number of artists were involved in motorcycle accidents over the years - some were involved on multiple occasions. Traffic accidents were just an accepted part of everyday life in a country where people drove fast, used no protection (like helmets) and took risks without thinking very far into the future.*

**To name a few of the many injured in traffic accidents during that time: Ghost Rider, Toyan, Junjo, Danny Dread, Trevor Ranking, U Brown, Neville Lee, Tiger, John Wayne and Charlie Chaplin. Knobby, from YP, was killed by a drunk driver*

Jamaicans, at least a noticeable number of them, drive like there were no such things as brakes. We often found ourselves gripping the seat as our taxi driver swerved around a "walkfoot man" or dodged a bicycle rider who shouted curses to the wind as we sped past. George Phang drove fast, and we occasionally accompanied him as he drove to drop off a tape to a studio or stop off at Sonic Sounds to check his sales. With the treble turned up to ear-splitting levels and the bass shaking the very structure of the auto, Phang slipped wildly in between the oncoming buses and trucks. But when he tried that in Canada, he was in for a surprise. Not realizing that here traffic laws are enforced, Phang hit the gas pedal upon entering the highway. The police stopped him a number of times for speeding, but he just smiled and explained that he was a visitor. After several such run-ins, the policeman turned to his companion, Yumpi, and pleaded, "You're a Canadian. Please make him slow down!"

Along with the rumors involving people came the frequent "business" schemes we were invited to join, or the requests for favors, like would we carry up some 'wood sculptures' with us to Toronto. Everyone knew someone who could "set us up." People came to us with stories about

their newest, supposedly foolproof method of getting ganja into the US. One that was making the rounds was that you could compress it and pack it into the souls of your shoes. "You can get half a pound in each foot," we were assured. We explained we were "strictly music business," and people usually understood and backed off. But someone else would soon come along with an even newer idea that was “guaranteed” – put the herb in a package and spray the package with Viva to fool the sniffer dogs. According to the local lore, there were people in Mobay who could deliver the weed “right to your door” abroad by putting it in equipment being sent out for repair. The previous year, the suggested plan had been packing it in the sides of containers. And there were, according to Sugar's friend Psalms, some people with some kind of resort in Negril that would "set us up for a few days and “treat us nice".

Likewise, everyone seemed to have a “riddim” to sell – something on tape that we could theoretically take and voice an artist over and take home to Canada to release. Most of these people were not record producers, but ordinary people, perhaps on the periphery of the music business, like studio staff or an artist's brother. Small-scale producing was a fallback resource for people, something they could do on the side if they had a regular job, or something they could pursue easily while unemployed as so many young singers were willing to donate their time and voice in hopes of getting discovered. Just because a rhythm track had been used once didn't diminish its value in Jamaican eyes. With luck, you might find just the right singer to voice over it and have a big seller.

In the same way, artists would happily make you their manager at first sight. Maybe they hoped that the foreign contacts you had would be useful someday. Lt. Stitchie assigned Dave the post of Manager for Canada within half an hour of meeting us, and Jazzbo used to tell Dave he was the "CEO" of Ujama, Canada, We ran into a young fellow from the UK in the Youth Promotion yard who, stuttering in shock, told us that Documents, after having known him for all of five minutes, had given him control of YP in the UK. The fellow from England pleaded a grace period of seven days after his return home to decide, but he had nothing to fear. These were mainly ornamental posts that never required the fulfillment of any duties. But artists liked to know they had a foreign contact they could summon if needed.

Reggae Quarterly # **7** Half Pint “Special Ragamuffin Issue”

The biggest story coming out of Jamaica in 1986 was “Greetings”, the hit by Half Pint. “Greetings” proved that, yes, music could bring people together. It could change the way people see each other and themselves. Greetings was the great unifier – it brought people together with music, under the banner of dancehall.

Who in the Kingston music scene didn't identify as a "ragamuffin'? For decades, the elites of Jamaican society had been telling average Jamaicans that the songs they loved were nothing more than the tasteless, unsophisticated music of the culturally unevolved.

Typical of former colonies, many upwardly mobile Jamaicans looked to England, the former colonizer, to define good taste. Too insecure in their attachment to a purely Jamaican identity,

many looked to foreign cultures for assurance. If a work of art or a style of dress were acceptable abroad, it was probably safe.

The identity of people in the ghetto had long been defined from above. What comes from Europe is OK, but what comes from home, well, it might be embarrassing to Jamaica, so it would be better to keep it hidden. And dancehall, with its often lude lyrics and loud, driving rhythms, was an embarrassment to the upper class.

But here came Half Pint, springing onto the scene with a message of goodwill and unity to all those dancehall music devotees. Finally, dancehall fans had a label they could identify with. No longer did they have to aspire to appearances on stage shows like “real” musicians, or try to play North-Americanized pop. They were “ragamuffins”! All united by dancehall. And Half pint was 'bigging up' all of them.

"Greetings I bring – from Jah - to all ragamuffins."

“Greetings” was a great pop song, bouncy and cheerful with an uplifting message of unity. To the sufferers in Jamaica, it said, "Yes, we may not have money, but we have music. And we have the dancehall.” Being a ragamuffin became not only acceptable – it was cool.

The only problem was that no one could dance to it. When sound systems started to play Greetings, listeners were puzzled and didn't respond. The Youth Promotion crew seemed genuinely confused by the rhythm. Sly's relentless 4/4 kick-drum beat was way ahead of its time, and Jamaican listeners had no context within which to process it. Later, that beat appeared in "house” music and became ubiquitous in electronic dance music. But without the usual syncopation that dancehall fans used to guide their hips, the song remained a huge hit, but not an inspiration to head to the dance floor.

And Half Pint still did quite well with it. Once the rest of the world caught up with the sound, it became enshrined as an ‘80s classic – one of the best-loved songs of the entire decade and the new dancehall anthem.

Clancy Eccles

I can’t recall what inspired us at first to go and search out Clancy Eccles. His history in reggae went way back to the early 1960s. Not only did he record such hits as “Fatty Fatty” and “Feel the Riddim”, but he worked as a producer and promoter of other artists.

What made him a little different was the way his musical career mixed with politics. The PNP used several of his songs, and he made several more supporting the party over the years. In his role in organizing the PNP "musical bandwagon" that toured Jamaica putting on live concerts to support Michael Manley in 1972, he helped present many popular artists to the public, artists like The Wailers, Toots and the Maytals, Junior Byles and Max Romeo.

So, we started our search by asking around. Someone directed us to Clancy's tailor shop on one of the streets of downtown Kingston around Parade. But when we arrived, he was out. So we went about our other business eventually ending up in Gussie's Music Works Studio, where we told Gussie we were looking for Clancy. "Why, he's right here!" Gussie exclaimed, pointing to the back. And there he was. So we chatted and made plans to meet up again.

Seemed his hangout was Petal’s bar a little ways up Chancery Lane. There he would round up Freddy Mackay who he was recording at the time to arrange recording details (and joke around. Freddie loved to laugh and had a typically Jamaican absurdist streak)

When Gregory’s stop closed, the bustle on Chancery just moved up the lane. Freddy McKay used to pass the afternoon drinking. Clancy Eccles would come by to round up Freddie and stay to chat for a while. While Clancy was easy going but sharply intelligent, Freddie was completely laid back. He loved to laugh and joke around but sometimes after a few beers, he was not articulate at all

In a short time, Clancy became a real friend. One afternoon we climbed in his car, and he drove us out to his home in Portmore, where we spent the day chatting about his past and current recordings.

Clancy explained his father was white, so even though he was a bad boy, he never went to jail. The police would pick him up, but they had to let him go because of his dad. After a few spliffs, he would become philosophical and ponder how he would run the country. His plan mainly involved legalizing ganja so all the tourists would come and smoke it here in Jamaica, and there wouldn't be any left to export. End of Crime.

He played us the latest song he had recorded with Freddie McKay, “Paulette”, an upbeat love song with a contemporary vibe. We could see it had a broad appeal. So we took a box of 100 up to Canada and sold them out pretty quickly. We were looking forward to a great revival for Freddy.

But by the time we returned to Jamaica, six months later, Clancy gave us the news that Freddy had died suddenly. As usual in Kingston, it was impossible to get a straight story on the circumstances. They said he just got stomach pain and died. They thought it was from chicken he ate. It was later reported to have been a heart attack. Like when Squingie died. People told us that one day his belly just swelled up big and he died. But we never found out anything more. But the loss of yet another person, still so young and so talented as Freddy, was tragic - and all too common in Jamaica.

We spent some more time hanging out with Clancy on Chancery Lane, met his son, Clancy Eccles Junior. Down by the bar with Clancy, we ran into a lost and forlorn-looking young man who turned out to the son of Peter Tosh. Once it was pointed out, the resemblance was unmistakable. But he seemed so timid and so alone in the alley, it was hard to believe he was the offspring of a superstar. He was trying, like everyone on Chancery Lane, to break into the music business.

A lot of artists and random interesting types would come by, but hanging out at Petal's without Freddie McKay, wasn't the same. Clancy went on to enjoy something of a well-deserved revival. He passed away in 2005.

Stur-Mars brings the bling

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Stur-Mars didn't start the "bling" craze. Back in the early '80s. All the Gemini crew wore gold rope chains with their names in gold on a round black pendant. The Volcano Posse traveled draped in gold chains and was always looking for more. The word "bling" may not have been popular yet, but the concept of showing off with high-priced jewelry was gaining ground. The consumerist vision was expanding in the later '80s. The new status symbols were brand names and logos.

In this vein, Kenneth Black, AKA Skeng Don (or simply Skeng), decorated his new record label with that easily recognized symbol of ostentatious wealth, the BMW logo. Another logo of his was the horseshoe representing his involvement with horse racing and gaming.

The whole sensibility was changing rapidly in the second half of the decade. No more was Max Romeo crooning, "Are you a commercialize, grabbing at the cash box?" ("One Step Forward" produced by Lee Perry) Being materially motivated was no longer shameful. Everyone was happily grabbing at the cashbox and consuming American made clothing, running shoes, hats, jewelry. The goal wasn't a little cottage but a big house up on the hill with a swimming pool in the yard. Not a motorcycle, but a "Bimmer (also known as a "Beamer" or a BMW)." It wasn't good enough to sing, like the Kingstonians, "We a sufferer" as if one had no choice in one's economic position. As an artist, it was no longer enough to be a "humbled dread" and have clean hands and a pure heart. You had to aim high, and the new goal was not spiritual or cultural understanding, but material possessions. The whole U.S. consumer culture of brands and labels and designers was crashing down on Jamaican dancehall. And there was Stur-Mars and Skeng Don to embody the change.

With his close ties to Miami, Skeng seemed to promise access to streets lined with gold. Everyone wanted to work for him. His crew enjoyed luxuries no other sound system could compete with. Skeng's artists were given white suits and regularly flown to Miami to perform and record. While away, they developed a taste for the good life abroad.

Supercat became Don Dadda on Skeng's sound, Stur-Mars. Previously under the shadow of his mentor and friend Early B, Supercat found his niche with Skeng. The milieu of Skeng Don's organization suited his bad-boy style and gave him the confidence to come out on his own. Skeng opened a store-front in Toronto on Eglinton Avenue West, manned by the duo of Cliffy and George. They often said Skeng was coming to Toronto, but we could never get a precise time or place. Sadly, we never got to interview Mr. Black. The closest we came was when Jingles insisted I say hello to him on the phone once when we were sitting around the Skateland office chatting, and Skeng happened to call Jingles in regards to the PNP rally at Skateland where Stur-Mars was to perform.

We had run into a large protest at Half Way Tree earlier that day. We were standing near the entrance to the yard behind Aquarius studio. As people began pouring into the street, Horace Martin and someone who worked in one of the stores pulled us inside as they slammed the door shut and pulled down the gate. We watched from behind the bars of the gate as protesters milled around the streets carrying signs and chanting. In back, Horace Martin kept us entertained, clowning around as usual.

We didn't go into the studio this time after our initial unenthusiastic welcome by Herman Chin Loy when we visited the first time in 1983. While he did show us around and was willing to chat with us a bit about his work with Augustus Pablo, he had a habit of correcting minute details in our questions. His restrained manner and his disdainful expression, when asked about his music, convinced us that it would be pointless trying to get an interview. He wasn't at all pleased when Dave had suggested a particular record (can't recall which) was the first dub album, and he assured us that, beyond a shadow of a doubt, his Aquarius Dub was the first. I am sure he only saw us at all because we came with Pablo's approval. Other times, when we went into the store, we always saw him in the back, shuffling around, taking care of business matters.

We could easily have gone to the dance with Stur-Mars that night, but people warned us that when politics and music mix, it's best to stay away. As it turned out, there were no problems, and videos of the event still circulate on YouTube. But we had learned that, in Jamaica, anything can happen, and often does. So we stayed at home and listened to the faint melodies carried over by the breeze.

I don't know if Skeng has ever done an interview about his music. Eventually, Mr. Back returned his focus to his construction business, but his daughter, Connolly, has followed her father's interest in politics and is president of the PNP's youth organization.

1987 Dancehall was becoming a legitimate art form

Jamaica had a different feel in 1987. The streets were cleaner. The higglers* were gone. There were no more stalls along the street around Half Way Tree. The changes allowed for a freer flow of people and traffic. Still, they created an atmosphere of efficiency that seemed ominous given the usual everyday chaos in a city like Kingston with the poverty, the crumbling infrastructure, and the oppressive heat. Downtown, Orange Street had been painted with warnings, "Thieves keep out. Vigilante posse is watching you."

**The higglers were the men and women who sold their wares along the street, the "informal" market*

Jammy was away, and a brave, determined Mama Iris held down the fort. That meant getting visas for artists to travel, keeping up with payments, and making sure the sound ran smoothly. She would announce to everyone waiting in the yard that she wasn't going to pay any royalties to any artist who couldn't sign his name while Jammy was gone so "no one could say she robbed him", and she would scold the crew for carrying on at the dance the night before. Not only had one of the crew carried a girl onto the truck for a little frolic, but another crew member had threatened one of her daughters. Mama Iris had to maintain disciple in the camp which consisted of a crew of a dozen or so potentially rowdy youth.

But there were some things in Kingston that never seemed to change. The bicycle "juicy" still *came by with his soursop, peanut punch, and roots with honey. Livestock still roamed the busy streets. Mainly pigs and goats downtown, but in the yards there were chickens. Chickens were ubiquitous and made their presence known every morning. No matter where you went in Jamaica, you were sure to be awoken by a rooster.

And most important, Jamaica remained as “music craved” as ever. BBC reporter Colin Grant asked in a column, “Why has the Caribbean nation gained a reputation for being the loudest island on the planet?"* In a 2012 article emphasizing the vital role of music is Jamaica's cultural and political development, Grant claimed, "Everywhere you go in Jamaica, you hear music – loud music. Although authorities recently enforced an island-wide musical curfew, there is a growing campaign to relax the restrictions."

- *Jamaica, The loudest island on the planet? Colin Grant, BBC World Service, September 26, 2012*

Kingston seemed to exist with a 24-hour backing track that accompanied every daily activity from taking the minibus to work in the morning with the radio blasting and the driver toasting, to falling asleep at night with the distant echoes of a sound system floating by.

More than that, everyone had a song or a rhythm track on tape – something that could be converted into a record. Even the ‘juicy’ at Aquarius had a gospel record he wanted us to take to Canada to sell. (Even abroad, Jamaican continued to sprout music. The Jamaican crossing guard ay my niece’s school in Toronto used his public exposure to turn over a few of his CDs on the side.)

Back again, in Kingston, we noticed the tension building. The police would show up routinely at Sugar Minott's yard, hinting broadly, "I'm thirsty, I need a drink," or "I need some lunch money. I'm broke." Sometimes they would take someone to the station, but they usually released him later that day or the day after. Or they would simply keep the herb and walk away. Rumors circulated that the Spanishtown police were taking saws and cutting down people's herb plants and selling the herb themselves. Goldie was on Little Kew Road, picking up some Indica when he was stopped and checked by the police. They took him down to the station but said they weren't holding him, they were just hustling. They took $100, leaving him with $10 and let him walk out.

The police in Kingston were often scarier than the criminals. Sitting in the Parkview Restaurant on North Parade with Delano Stewart one afternoon, we were befriended by a constable from Harmon Barracks. He took a liking to us and (as we tried to escape him) followed us up to Petal's bar at the top of Chancery, where he proudly showed us his gun and leather sack of bullets. He explained merrily how a bullet had gone through the ID he kept in his shirt pocket, and straight into his chest, but he survived. While he sat there downing a quantity of rum and smoking his collie weed, his loaded gun, which he held resting on his leg, was pointing directly at my foot. In another attempt to escape, we started walking, but the constable followed us along Chancery Lane where, we noticed, people seemed to be avoiding him. Finally, we left the area to go to Channel One and managed to lose him at last.

Another day, driving into Waterhouse, a minibus cut off our taxi, and the driver tried to go around it, which angered the minibus driver's companion. "Hey, white boy," he yelled out the window at us, "You can't wait?" In a flash, the driver pulled a gun out from under a pile of rags on the seat beside him and aimed it straight at the minibus driver, yelling, "What did he say? I'll

shoot his head off!" leading to an animated shouting match between the minibus and taxi. Dave told the driver everything was fine and not to worry about it. Somewhat reluctantly, the driver finally replaced the firearm under the cloth, assuring us the gun was legal. "Don't worry," he explained, "I'm a policeman. I just drive when I'm on leave."

Cocaine

Cocaine was infiltrating deeper into the reggae scene. The drug had started appearing on the island in the early 1980s en route to Miami and New York from Colombia or other South American locations. Some of the gangs in Kingston who had survived on politics now regrouped around the drug trade and a different kind of violence was creeping into the city. It wasn't long before crack-cocaine use was spreading throughout the formerly peaceful ganja smoking music community. People got into the habit of smelling a spliff to check for cocaine before accepting a draw. The grip of politics in everyday life was slowly loosening. Money replaced ideology as the motivation for violence in poor communities. Youth in the ghetto no longer looked up to the neighborhood organizer, the community leader. The new superstar was the drug baron. The 1980s was the decade of the ‘narcotraficante' as hero and role model. From films like Scarface to the real-life exemplars like Pablo Escobar, these figures seemed so much larger than life, so compelling. They had access to seemingly limitless supplies of money, lived in unheard-of luxury. Anything they wanted was theirs.

Jamaica was producing a few of its own native sons who emulated the life of the international drug lords. They operated between Jamaican and either Miami or New York. In close association with local gangs in both countries, they moved drugs and laundered their money. The music business provided a good cover for financial maneuverings between Jamaican and foreign.
As if in response to the new atmosphere, the music seemed to speed up. The beat was accelerating, and the toasters were cramming more and more words into each sentence creating tongue-twisting lyrics careening ahead at a madcap pace.

Sanchez Lady in Red

Oddly, for me and Dave, what marked the greatest change in reggae music at the time (and what made me realize that a new generation was taking over), wasn't “Sleng Teng” and the 'digital' revolution, but the appearance, and great popularity, of new singer Sanchez and his version of the American hit song “Lady in Red” (original by Chis DeBurgh).

When “Lady in Red” (1987 Hugh Redman) first came out, Dave, who was still hosting his reggae program on CKLN radio, predicted a flash in the pan. The song would be noticed - because the original pop version was so hot at the time - but then it would quickly be forgotten (because, despite being popular, the original was just so awful).

Were we in for a surprise! It turned out to be one of the most popular songs of the decade. And not only that, it also spawned a tsunami of imitations – each one in a similar format, a pop song over a bland, “digital”, bridgeless, one-or-two-chord rhythm. What had formerly been an act of artistic spontaneity occurring nightly in the dancehall had become a recording trend, and one that did very well in sales.

Generally, in the sound-system dances, singers would sing scraps of well-known songs over whatever rhythm was being played at the moment, trying to pick a song that would match the chords in the rhythm as much as possible. But when the chords didn't match, no one much minded because it was just someone "trying a thing" and he or she got props for the intention. Recording didn't allow the same leeway.

Jamaicans had always recorded cover versions of American songs. Some were pop songs, although the majority covered were soul or R&B. But some were from folk singers or rock groups, like John Holt singing If I were a Carpenter (Original Tim Hardin)*, Norma Fraser's lovely rendition of "The First Cut is the Deepest" (Originally written by Cat Stevens, recorded by P P Arnold), The Tenors singing "Weather Report" (Simon and Garfunkle) or Toots and the Maytals covering "Take Me Home Country Roads" (John Denver), to name a few. But in most cases, the rhythm had been designed or at least adapted to match the chord structure of the original. In the case of the new artists singing pop hits over the digital rhythms, the rhythm came before the song, so the match was never perfect.

**Which contains the classic misheard line, "If I were a miller and your mill should grind me…"*

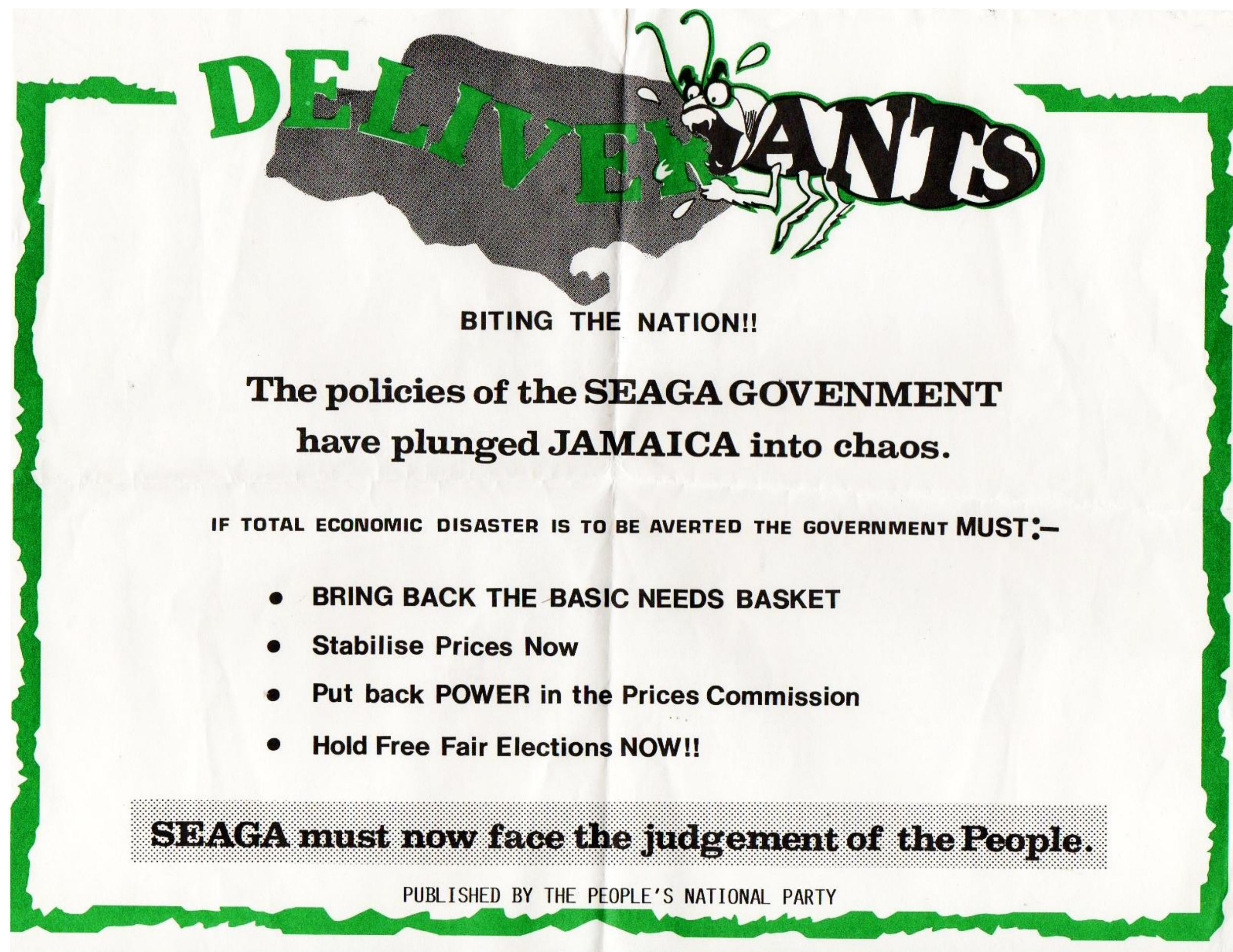
Many of the first generation of dancehall singers had already-established recording careers behind them before starting to vocalize over the new style rhythms. Artists like Johnny Osbourne, Tony Tuff, Sugar Minott, or Barrington Levy all had been recording roots, reggae and love songs long before the digital wave hit. But Conrad Cristal or Chuck Turner had just come up in the new dancehall world. They didn't have the training, and it showed in their performance. Their singing lacked nuance. There was no force, no emotion. To me, this onslaught of thoughtless pop versioning was the first sign that reggae was moving in a direction that I couldn't follow.

But Jamaicans took this trend all the way to its logical conclusion. Which is where we are today with all the do-over pop songs and the flat digitalized (really, digitalized this time) backing tracks. Reggae and urban–American music began a conversation in the mid-80s that continues to this day. When the big record labels first saw the link in the 1990s, they jumped in blindly, signing major reggae acts. Unfortunately, the new acts didn't come with instructions on how to promote this new sound to an international market. The spike in sales couldn't be maintained. So, the acts were dropped as quickly as they had been grabbed up.

But that didn't mean Jamaicans gave up on the link themselves. The new millennium saw lots of crossover between Jamaica and the U.S. in terms of music. Jamaicans were working with rap groups, rappers appearing with Jamaican artists on dancehall recordings. Who can argue with success?

As cassettes gave way to CDs and then streaming, Jamaican music moved further ahead on the international scene, but something was being lost at home, some Jamaican essence that had made reggae what it was. It was still reggae on the surface, but an invisible piece was missing, a certain depth, a certain spatial element. The multidimensionality of the reggae of the '70s and early '80s had yielded to a music, while more complex technically, sounded flatter and more one dimensional – to my ears, at least. But abroad, reggae was taking over the world. The Far East had been a hotbed for a decade. Now other countries in Europe, like France, Germany and Spain, were catching up. Then came Brazil with a whole generation of roots reggae and rap bands all its own.

The End of the Seaga Years



By the end of the decade, the tide had turned completely, and the 1989 election saw the PNP return to power with Michael Manley still at the helm. Once again, the Jamaicans dared to hope that, with Manley's return, poverty would be conquered, and Jamaica would rise up and stand on its own as an economically independent country. Papa Eddie's star was declining, and people turned to Manley once again in the hope of change.

But the heady days of the socialist movement in Latin American and the Caribbean were dying just as the cold war was winding down. Manley never recovered his former drive, and he stepped down in 1992 for health reasons. He died several years later.

Meanwhile, a new star had been rising in the southwest – Portia Simpson-Miller (she was then Portia Simpson), representative to parliament and PNP vice president. We first became aware of her when we drove by a house near Maxfield Ave. and saw, in 10' high letters along the street side of the slanting zinc roof, the message, "Portia is Beautiful." Goldie explained to us how much people loved her in this area, her home constituency, and how popular she was becoming throughout the country. He even managed to get me a T-shirt from headquarters bearing the same slogan.

Simpson-Miller was working out of a tough constituency – one that contained some of the roughest areas in the Kingston/St Andrew areas like Payneland and Majesty Gardens (aka Backto) but she was one tough, determined and ambitious lady, though that would be skipping ahead. It would be 17 more years before she was elected as Jamaica's first female prime minister.

Bringing the ghetto uptown

What had it all come to – all the years of frustration - artists living in poverty, enduring exploitation by producers? Was it worth it for the producers who watched pirates releasing their records abroad with no possible recourse? Or who had to pay out just to get a record spun on the radio? Or was it worth it for the sound system operators subject to relentless harassment by police who raided dances and destroyed equipment? Was it worth the random violence in the dances? Where had this turbulent, anarchic process brought the industry?

Well, no one scoffs at reggae now, not here or even in Jamaica. Even the nefarious Snoop Dog now calls himself Snoop Lion and travels to Jamaica to pay homage to Bunny Wailer and hang out in Trench Town with the roughnecks. But is Trench Town even what it used to be?

Back in the day, this ghetto neighborhood, located between West Road and Collie Smith Drive, was built as a showcase housing developments after the Second World War, but was then abandoned and left to be torn apart and reshaped into small garrison communities. The divided territories came to be controlled by political groups. The "community leader" in each area delivered votes for their party and oversaw neighborhood discipline. These community leaders also helped people and took care of the needy. In return for getting out the vote, they received various kinds of support from the government for the community, which in turn, enhanced the community leader's power. Each tiny section of several square blocks was a tightly knit, closely ruled fiefdom which had to be protected from threats by its neighbors.

All through the '70s, these small enclaves became warring communities, each with a standing army and organized patrols. Nobody was safe. So many innocent people were killed or injured by gunfire as the political gangs battled out the upcoming elections, each side fighting for the preservation of its "territory", the little bit of city land. And all the while, people were struggling to feed their kids. Businesses ceased to operate during the violence, and unemployment soared. It was hard to get to a job when you had to pass through a maze of borders and cross through potentially hostile territory. One of the most dangerous neighborhoods in an already dangerous city, Trenchtown, was a strict no-go zone even throughout the '80s. But what about now?

These days, they are calling Trench Town the Jamaican Hollywood. The former ghetto has become a major "tourist attraction" listed in guide books and websites. The curious come from all over the world, pay their $12 for a guided tour through the zone to the "government yard," where Bob Marley spent his teenage years writing music and courting Rita. Trench Town is now just another stop of the cultural tours of Kingston Jamaica, run by several companies. The tour is good entertainment and the reviews on TripAdvisor rave about it:

> SuileEile writes, "Really liked Trench Town culture yard! The tour was cute and gave you the history of Trench town and all the amazing musicians who came from there! If

> you are in Kingston drop down. It was $12 US dollars. For a 45 minute tour. Very basic but very interesting :)."

> Another visitor adds, "By visiting Trench Town and its culture yard, you'll witness what a ghetto is, and understand it isn't just a bad place you need to avoid. It is full of culture, alive with children's laughs, and visited by the random goat walking down the street. "**

*** http://www.tripadvisor.ca/Attraction_Review-g147310-d3492922-Reviews-Trench_Town_Culture_Yard-Kingston_Kingston_Parish_Jamaica.html*

Many tour offerings focus on Bob Marley, understandably. But not all. The whole music industry is wide open and expanding its potential for welcoming tours from abroad. The Rocker's International shop on Orange Street, where Augustus Pablo tried to forge a self-supporting artists collective in one of the poorest areas of the city, is one of several stops on a musical tour of Kingston that guides tourists through the musical history of reggae, featuring a visit to a pressing plant. As the tour description states:

> "Vinyl still plays a part on Jamaica's sound systems; we watch a pressing at what was regarded as Kingston's first state of the art studio, Dynamic Sounds… We get to play on the mixing desk used by legendary figures from Jamaica and abroad and watch the whole process of recording, imprinting onto vinyl and labeling in one of the last remaining pressing plants on the island. For those that would like a keepsake you can record your own dancehall, reggae edit to play to your friends. Tours start at 10.00 am and cost US$ 106.00 per person based on two people participating but not including transport."*

**http://www.hotelmockingbirdhill.com/experiences/pressing-tunes-a-historical-music-tour-of-kingston/*

But that's hardly all. A company called Responsible Travel, whose motto is "Travel like a local" * offers a music tour where you get to "meet musicians" * Damien Marley himself offers a five night Reggae Cruise, "Welcome to Jamrock", that will made its debut in October 2014. "The state-of-the-art Norwegian Pearl ship will set sail October 20, 2014, from Miami, Florida with stops in Montego Bay and Ocho Rios, Jamaica before its return on October 25, 2014."

*http://www.responsibletravel.com/thingstodo/10845/jamaican-music-tour-kingston-jamaica

The press release emphasizes the support of official channels. "The Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB), an agency of the Ministry of Tourism for the island, has jumped on board to endorse the world-class Welcome To Jamrock Reggae Cruise and will play an essential role in spreading the word to the masses."*
**http://www.reggaeville.com/nc/artist-details/artist/tarrus-riley/news/damian-marleys-welcome-to-jamrock-reggae-cruise-2014/ac/news.html*

This is really something new. Back in our days, the tourist board, the radio, the papers were busy trying to hide Rastas and reggae music, and when they couldn't, apologizing for them.
But now, rather than being seen as a threat to civil society and an embarrassment to the country, Jamaican popular music is being harnessed for its revenue-attracting potential. It's now become an economically productive resource and exploited for its potential as a tourist draw. All of which creates a very different atmosphere for music creation and consumption in Jamaica. The

television is full of music videos. Both older reggae and the new heavy-duty dancehall can be heard over the internationally accessible Sirius satellite radio.

1987

In the later ‘80s, Dave and I were frequently involved in local events. The promoters relied on Dave to announce the shows and to host the performers on his radio program. It was essential to let people know that the entertainers were really in town, and the concert wasn't a “ginal” thing.

It wasn’t uncommon for people to arrive at a venue only to find the main attraction was nowhere to be seen; it happened all the time. (We were sitting in Sonic Sounds one day when in walked Leroy Smart - on the exact date he was supposed to be headlining a show in Toronto.) It was a familiar scam, so common that people in Toronto wouldn’t go to a show until they heard the performers on the radio first.

We were also often asked to handle small problems that the entertainers ran into while in Toronto. Like one morning when King Kong called after us his show - from jail. There had been a little "domestic disturbance," and his wife called the cops. He called us from inside to ask us to change his flight for the following day. A week later, he was still there because she wouldn’t drop the charges.

When the young and still mischievous Frankie Paul came to town, we went along with the promoter, or whoever was on duty, to keep him in check as he was bent on getting hold of his passport and running off to New York. But, as he was legally blind, there was some kind of clause in his contract or visa that he needed to be accompanied and under someone's care. But he didn't think much of that idea. So, he was constantly trying to duck out, unless lured by music to remain on the spot. At one point he did escape but was located, and the show went ahead as planned.

To the local promoters, our frequent trips to Jamaica came in handy as we could carry down contracts to be signed, give advances, take artists to embassies, and even sit on the plane with them to make sure they made it.

Earl Sixteen and Phillip Fraser where here for a show promoted by Bunny Gemini in the middle of winter. I booked then into a downtown hotel for Bunny. The next day, after rehearsal, I took them out to do some shopping. When they were finished and ready to return to the hotel, I gave them simple directions - the hotel was two blocks from the subway stop- and was about to turn away when a forlorn Phillip Fraser raised his fuzzy, gloved hand and called out, "Betty! Please don't leave us!" He was still shivering in his light jacket and was terrified that he might get lost in the cold and freeze to death in the street. He seemed so distraught, I agreed to go all the way over to the hotel with them – and ended up with a loyal friend for life. We saw Phillip about five years ago when he came to Toronto. He still hasn't forgotten us, and he still talks about that January day he almost froze in Toronto.

Risto Benjie

On returning from our winter visit to Jamaica, in 1987, we found ourselves on an Air Jamaica flight with Risto Benjie, who was coming to town to join the Jammy crew for some dances in Canada. Superblack, who was supposed to accompany him couldn't get his visa - or something had misfired - and Benjie was at the airport, alone, with no idea what to do.

At home in Jamaica, Benjie hung out with Jammy's sound crew, where he was apprenticing with the big deejays. As tiny and young as he was (he was 13), Benjie was a tough kid. He cut another boy with a knife for trying to get into a photo someone was taking of him (not me). Quick to anger, he came close to flinging a bottle at Malvo, but Nya gave him a 'box' (a punch) and calmed him down. His family was so poor that even the little money he could pick up deejaying at dances helped support them. And finally, his big opportunity, his first trip abroad to perform with the sound abroad.

His very pregnant mother brought him to the airport in Kingston and we assured her we would make sure he got through alright. All he was carrying was a small red bag, his papers and the clothes on his back. Sniffling and sneezing from a raging head cold, Benjie sat on the plane and shivered in the air-conditioning but didn't have anything else to put on. When we got off the plane, we took him through customs. He was hungry, so I gave him my bun and cheese and told him to sign the customs declaration form. He asked me how to spell Anthony.

In Toronto, no one was at the airport to pick Benjie up, and he had no idea where he was supposed to go. So we took him back to our apartment and began to make phone calls. In the airport taxi, Benjie amused himself playing with the automatic windows. Until he saw my Walkman. His face lit up like meteor shower, and he grabbed for it, instinctively, as though every fiber of his being was fixated on that object. Music called to him above everything else.

In our apartment, Benjie phoned Jammy to let him know he arrived safely. While we were busy on the phone trying to find his family, the little roughneck was busy collecting all the loose change Dave customarily left on the dresser. We gave him some juice and something to eat, along with a little lecture on respect. We finally located an aunt who told us to put him in a taxi and send him over there. As he left the building, he called out to Dave, complaining bitterly that he wanted to borrow a cassette but that I wouldn't let him. The next time we saw him was on the sound at the first Toronto dance, deejaying on the dance floor with a little circle of fans around him.

Benjie was well received abroad, but back in Jamaica, he continued to live the hooligan life. He finally came to a bad end not so long ago, having left music and dedicated himself, according to locals, to “badness” like his father. There's a small picture of him with Ghost Rider in #8.

The first of the Jammy dances in Toronto was packed with people all crowding into the Hungarian Hall on St Clair Avenue West. With the scenes of the "old country" landscapes on the wall behind the stage, the crew set up on the floor in front and soon were surrounded by dancing bodies. But something felt wrong. The atmosphere was growing tense. The speakers cut out a couple of times. Sounds like bottles breaking echoed in random in parts of the hall. Some of the patrons (including us) began to feel uneasy and headed for the exits. Several groups of people were filling out the door and into the street. We were standing on the stairs in front, talking to Horace Andy when shots rang out. In a second, everyone scattered. We ran up a side street and

waited. Once we felt the coast was clear, we walked back down to St. Clair Ave to find a cab. But on turning the corner. More shots rang out, and we just ran.

Since we were already headed in the direction of home, we just kept going and didn't go back to see what had happened. I heard the dance just shut down. But they had other dates to play on their tour, and the rest went on without problems.

Red Dragon

Our friend Blue brought up trio Red Dragon, Flourgon and Lizard for a show on the heels of their megahit "Hol'a Fresh". The day before the show, he left them in my hands and went off to take care of business. The boys, all in their early 20s, wanted to go shopping. So keyboard player and friend Bernie Pitters dropped us off at the Eaton Centre, one of the biggest malls in the country. When we got out of the car and walked inside the towering, multi-level building teeming with shoppers, the three of them just stood there, immobile. Looking up, down and around - at all the four levels of stores, the zigzagging escalators, the three-story-high fountains, the food courts - and they panicked. Insisting that everything in all of the stores would be "too expensive," they begged me to bring them to a "black people store."

So, we headed back uptown to a store named Honest Ed's. Honest Ed's was a Toronto icon, the prototypical dollar store before dollar stores existed. Located in the middle of an area that had once been a Jamaican commercial center (but is now Korean), it was a garish, outrageously tacky, attention-seeking outlet. Here the boys felt at home. They were looking for the game Stratego and some moccasin boots. They didn't find them but ended the day happily with some new yellow cotton jackets and red jeans. We finished the outing with some street vendor hotdogs, where they marveled at the condiments.

Reggae Quarterly #8

In RQ #7, we talked about The Fabulous Flames, a group that had included Clancy Eccles. So in 8, we delved more deeply into the Flames by interviewing Lloyd Lovindeer, who just happened to be in the news again, enjoying one controversial hit after another. Although not well known by the world outside Jamaica, Lovindeer had some of the biggest hits of the '80s –massive hits that reached every age group and income bracket and became cultural icons. Lovindeer specialized in satire, and his material was dead sharp, outspoken and very funny. A smart businessman, he already controlled all his own records and shows. Neville lee called him a "rich" man.

We arranged to interview him at Sonic Sounds. A more melancholy comedian I have never met. Squirming the entire time, he tried to crack a few jokes, but with such a dejected demeanor, he came across as more depressed than funny. He was horrified at the idea of posing for a photo. The album covers were taken when he was alone with the photographer, he claimed, a more "private" thing. So, to make it easier, we found an empty room, and I got a few shots while we chatted. Once comfortable, he was friendly and sociable, but something lurking underneath never completely went away, some kind of sadness and bitterness mixed.

He was so famous, so celebrated throughout the Caribbean. According to Neville Lee, he was the "darling of Trinidad, the darling of Barbados," meaning his records were guaranteed to do well

there. So, it seemed strange when he came up behind us on the street one day shortly after and asked earnestly, "Do you remember me?" We never ran into him again as he was usually off the island touring the Caribbean, where he was even more adored than at home. But he never stopped making headlines. In 2011 he recorded “Sly Man Bruce” satirizing then PM Bruce Golding's handling of the extradition of "Dudus Coke" and the Manatt Commission. The song followed the tune of the folk song “Sly (or sometimes, ‘Slide’) Mongoose”. Again, right on target.

The Sensi Addict LP

In number eight, a good deal of space is given to Prince Jazzbo and his singer, Horace Ferguson. Aside from the fact that Jazzbo was one of the first producers to be working seriously with programmable instruments, he was a long-time friend, and we believed in his talent and wanted to give him a boost. So we added a feature on both producer and vocalist.

Prince Jazzbo had been urging us for years to get into the record business (mainly so that we could help him out). For years we insisted that we had no abilities in the field. We didn’t even own a car, so how could we distribute records? But he persisted. So finally, one day, we decided to prove our ineptitude and told him we would release “Sensi Addict” LP in Canada, but only to prove to him how incompetent we really were. So we shook hands and made a deal.

The lacquer Jazzbo gave us to take to Canada turned out to be no good as it had been used to make test pressings. So, Son Walters managed to pick up the tape for us on one of his record shopping stops in Jamaica. Jazzbo promised us, during one of the many bandulu phone calls, that he had wrapped it well to protect it on the flight. But when Son handed it to us, the reel was wrapped in crumpled-up aluminum foil. A little segment of the tape chipped off when Dave unwrapped it, creating a drop out in one of the songs. In all, the old Scotch brand reel to reel two-track – set to play at 7 3/4 speed - contained eight songs and seven versions, way too much to fit on a 12" LP. So we narrowed it down and took the tape to Cinram and arranged to have 1,000 copies pressed. In the process, we asked that the words, “To Prince Jazzbo from Dave + Beth” be etched in alongside the matrix number. Dave’s friend, graphic designer Heidi Palfrey contributed the cover layout.

Orders came in from here and there, and we spent a lot of time taking the LPs around to the shops in Toronto, and the disc was getting a good reception. Then the phone calls started coming - all late at night from a Bandulu phone near Olympic Way. It was Jazzbo. “Me hear say you release Sensi Addict in Japan” (or France, or Holland…..) Although Jazzbo trusted us enough to give us the tape and let us release the record, he had a big enough reserve of instinctive suspicion that he just couldn’t let go. He never accused us of anything, and I don’t think he really thought we were releasing records without his consent or knowledge. But he just had to check.

In the end, the experiment wasn’t a total failure after all, but it was hardly a great success. We sold off the 1,000 we pressed, but it took years. We broke even in the end, making back our expenses. So, we never tried again. We knew our limitations and stuck to the magazine and radio show.

Somehow around the same time, by virtue of the success the song “Sensi Addict” was enjoying, we managed to talk promoter Blue into bringing Horace Ferguson for one of his shows. So he asked us to take him the contract and advance the money. Jazzbo was mixed about the idea. He kept saying to Horace (jokingly), "Well, where is your ticket? When are you flying out? So, you're going to foreign to go and voice for everyman." Horace new that Jazzbo was teasing him, but that deep down inside, he was afraid of losing him. Horace was by far the strongest artist he had in his “stable” at the time. Jazzbo knew that while publicity would help the album, he could never keep Horace if he broke big. As it turned out. Horace didn't need to break big. He won the lottery twice, joined his wife in Florida and bought a big house.

RQ # 8 turned out to be the last issue. It became difficult to go to Jamaica regularly, and it was that close contact, that immediacy that made the magazine what it was. We could have done it another way, more commercial, employing reporters on the ground in various locations. But that wasn't what we wanted. We continued to work closely with local promoters and help with the publicity for shows. Dave continued doing Reggae Showcase, but the music had changed - the whole scene had changed. Neither of us felt comfortable in the musical atmosphere of homophobes making hit records spewing hatred against fellow human beings. Slackness had taken a highly misogynist and sexist turn. The scene looked ugly. A new level of anger was creeping in. Guns and drugs were appearing in places they would never have been seen before. The time was ripe to make a change. Dave quit the show in 1992, exactly ten years after he started it.

2010

The last time we visited Jamaica was in 2010. We stayed on the north coast, someplace we had never seen in all the time we spent on the island in the 1980s. Settled in our rental in the tiny village of Duncan's Bay, not far from Falmouth, we could see how much was the same- like the Chinese grocery store and the music coming out of every window, whether house, car, bus or truck. And we could see how much was very different. Ads from Digicell had replaced the ads for Ting (the grapefruit soda) on every corner store.

Our first move was to contact Prince Jazzbo, an old friend with whom we had remained in touch over the years. He came all the way out to Trelawney to see us when carrying the biggest box of ripe mangos ever seen. I think there were 40 or more. And it was the middle of February – hardly mango season. But he had used his influence to get them for us, and we ate every single one.

Arriving decked out in his satin suit of red, green and gold, with his cap to match, he walked sartorially through the small fishing village. But nobody much noticed. One Rasta woman who sold jewelry on the side of the road asked him if he were Bongo Herman.

The kids on the beach were having a party for local hero, deejay Charlie Black, drinking Hennessy and fine rum, and listening to their “bashment” sounds from someone's iPod. Dressed more for a formal dinner than a beach party, they stood in small cliques, chatting eagerly, clutching their drinks. No smoke was floating along the night breeze, just the regular beat of computer produced and mixed bass and drum machine music coming from the small digital speakers.

Jazzbo sat at the bar and lit up a big head spiff and was soon drifting deep into thought. Then, the "reasoning" began. It was good to see Jazzbo again, but sad. Things had changed in Jamaica. The younger generation was looking north to L.A. and Miami, not eastward to Addis Ababa, and the contribution of the dancehall foundation fathers was slowly fading from the collective memory.

While the kids stood around the water's edge sipping their cocktails, Jazzbo sat inside smoking and recalling a time when it was all new, a generation of break-out youth on their own path with a music and a system of beliefs that set them apart. The days of the pioneers in music seemed to have passed.

We said goodbye, and Jazzbo drove off, looking "cherry" and feeling mellow. He passed away a few years later, as have many of our former friends and contacts in Jamaica.

Here in Toronto, we still go to concerts when an old-time musician is passing through town. But it's a different scene here too. That first dance we went to in Toronto, in 1982, when Lui Lepke appeared chanting "Can't Take Me Landlord", there had been no other white people there- not a one. And people looked at us oddly, some with suspicion, some with mere curiosity. And so it went for many years.

Now you hardly hear a Jamaican accent at a show. Those first-generation immigrants are as old as we are and don't go out much either. But their kids do, and those kids are as Canadian as we are and don't give us a second thought. Not only Jamaicans go to the shows either. White people, Asian people, African people, Middle Eastern people, Pakistani people – every kind of people go.

Not only do they go to the shows, but they have also all created their own local brands of reggae that are popular within their national circles. There is Japanese reggae, American reggae, Brazilian – and industry people claim these brands sell better (locally) than what is coming out of Jamaica right now.

So, it's up to a new tech-savvy generation to keep promoting the music, as the music keeps changing and transforming into new genres and combinations. We both feel fortunate- honored really – to have been able to be there to witness some classic moments in the evolution of Jamaican music and to have known some amazing people.

Give thanks