

'REGGAE' FROM PAGE 8

of Black Uhuru, well captured on the compilation. There are three tracks from *Sinsemilla*, only two from *Red*, two from *Chill Out* and three from *Anthem*. Glad to see, by the way, that the *Anthem* tracks are the originals rather than Paul Smykle's dreary remixes. Would have liked to see 'Chill Out' and 'Puff She Puff' here, but in total the compilation is a fitting tribute to a well tough ensemble.

The Wailers

The definitive Bob Marley compilation has yet to be assembled, but this LP is a pretty fair portrayal of the Wailers in the days when they still included Peter Tosh and Bunny Livingstone.

The material is drawn from the *Catch A Fire* and *Burnin'* albums, which were the turning points for reggae on the international scene. The Rude Boy image was replaced by the spliff-smoking Rastaman, epitomised in the back-cover shot of Marley on *Burnin'*. The righteous anger and Biblical connotations of the music initially confused and then astounded white audiences.

Catch A Fire, recorded in London in 1972, was the Wailers' Island debut. American session guitarist Wayne Perkins and British keyboards player Rabbit Bundrick helped out, as did Robbie Shakespeare, who plays bass on 'Concrete Jungle'. The album has a slightly muted, disorientated feel to it, largely because the group was recording in unfamiliar surroundings, with Chris Blackwell producing for the first time.

Burnin', recorded the following year in Jamaica, showed a greater unity and sense of purpose, along with a more overt Rasta message. There was nothing subtle about 'I Shot The Sheriff' (originally called 'I Shot the Police') or 'Burnin' and Lootin'. The album grabbed instant attention from the music media and the Wailers were celebrities.

As a touring band, this particular unit never fulfilled the promise of its records. Livingstone didn't like touring much and Tosh was beginning

to resent the way Marley was beginning to dominate the group. Their departure left Marley to pursue his own directions as a songwriter and performer, and to put together the best reggae band ever.

As I said, the definitive Marley compilation has still to be made. But this collection serves as a fine companion to *Legend*, showing the burgeoning talent of a man with fire in his belly. We will remember him.

Third World

Third World have always trodden an uneasy path, blending reggae rhythms with other Caribbean sounds, as well as Latin and North American soul. Reggae purists shun much of their work as disco crossover, and with some justification. Their best music was produced in their days with Island, and their switch to CBS has seen them move more into the American mainstream.

The band was formed in 1973 by keyboard player Ibo Cooper and guitarist Cat Coore. Their debut album, *Third World*, was a sombre affair, featuring the low-key vocals of Milton Hamilton. He was subsequently replaced by Rugs Clark, a much stronger singer with a pronounced soul influence. Their follow-up album, *96 Degrees in the Shade*, is generally regarded as their best. Their distinctive harmonies recalled such groups as the Isley Brothers, yet they retained the roots feel which they were later to lose for good.

Third World's success peaked with 1978's *Journey To Addis*, featuring their trademark song, 'Now That We've Found Love'. Their output since has been erratic and disappointing, but this compilation catches most of their good moments. 'Prisoner In the Street' and 'African Woman' are both vocal showcases for Rugs, and 'Cool Meditation' is as sweet as its name implies. A fair representation of a band which has since sought other directions.

Toots and Gregory Isaacs the Maytals

Frederick 'Toots' Hibbert is no stranger to this country, having charmed New Zealand audiences some three years ago on a tour which had plenty of ups and downs and finished up a bit of a financial flop. One of the original Maytals, Jerry Mathias, was no longer with the group, his place being taken by two women singers. The show sometimes ventured a little too much into soul revue territory for my tastes, but when the band cooked on songs like '54-46', it was demolition time on the dancefloor. Since then, Toots has been singing solo, encouraged by a very smooth and businesslike American manager, who also handles Yellowman's affairs.

This compilation covers the full range of Toots's styles. He's never really been out of the spotlight since the early rock steady days, with Leslie Kong producing. From that era you get '54-46', along with 'Monkey Man', 'Sweet and Dandy' and 'Pressure Drop'. From the 70s you get 'Funky Kingston', 'Reggae Got Soul', 'Time Tough' and the questionable cover of 'Take Me Home Country Roads'. Toots spent a couple of years in the wilderness after that, returning with the patchy *Pass the Pipe*, which doesn't get a mention, followed by the slightly better *Just Like That*. His return to proper form came with the 1980 *Live In London* album, which was a testament to his vitality and longevity.

Toots's subsequent output has been a little bland, although 'Spiritual Healing' is a timeless ballad. His most recent single, 'Peace, Perfect Peace', is another slow one, suggesting that Toots is mellowing gracefully as he approaches his fifth decade. Save for the exclusion of 'Pomp and Pride' and 'Premature', this compilation charts the development of a charismatic performer.

Mr Isaacs, the Lonely Lover, continues to weave magic spells at the age of 35. A consummate singer of Lovers' Rock, Gregory is the unquestioned king of the late night smooch. This album is actually a live recording from a London concert of 1982. The tracks are almost identical to last year's Brixton Academy concert, which was released on Rough Trade.

Backed by the ubiquitous Roots Radics, Isaacs strings the songs together to make a Greatest Hits medley and allows the audience to sing the choruses back at him. He's a somewhat lazy live performer, but what there is of him is just superb. The silky voice, filled with gentle innuendo or woeful heartache, is quite simply unique. Just listen to 'Sunday Morning' and you'll be hooked. The man also has an ear for a pretty tune.

Strangely enough, all the material on this album pre-dates the Island days. I, for one, would have loved to hear a live version of 'Love Me With Feeling'. However, for those unfamiliar with Isaacs' earlier material, this is a worthwhile purchase.

Jimmy Cliff

Another star performer who now seems past his peak, Jimmy Cliff has been singing since his early teens (he's now 37). He talked his way into a recording studio in 1962, at the age of 14, and got his big break from Leslie Kong.

Kong was a Chinese Jamaican (or Chincarib), a fairly common racial mix which has also produced singer Sammy Dread and guitarist/producer Mikey 'Mao' Ching. It was with Kong producing that Cliff cut some of his best work. Included here are 'Vietnam', the controversial 1970 anti-war song, the lovely 'Sitting In Limbo', the spritely 'Let Your Yeah Be Yeah' and 'Bongo Man', and

the heartfelt gospel ballad 'Many Rivers To Cross'. These were among the last tracks produced by Kong, who died of a heart attack in 1970. Cliff went on to produce hits of his own, including 'The Harder They Come', later made into a movie starring Cliff, and 'You Can Get It If You Really Want', which also featured in the film. His last really successful effort was the 1973 album 'Struggling Man'. Cliff had by then become a Muslim, which alienated him somewhat from the strongly Rastafarian Jamaican music scene. His more recent work has been crossover commercial pap, culminating in the truly dreadful 'Reggae Nights' of last year. The voice is still there, but it's compilations like this that remind us of the inspiration that once was.

Rockers, Lovers, DJ's and Dubs

Also included in the Island series are four compilations of various artists, covering the broad spectrum of reggae styles.

The Strictly For Rockers set features singles released on Island between 1975 and 1984. And a splendid little collection it is, too. The term 'Rockers' can apply to anyone who follows reggae. The expression was used as the title of a hugely entertaining movie starring ace drummer Leroy 'Horsemouth' Wallace, and which had a brief session in Auckland last year. The soundtrack album is available here.

Strictly For Rockers contains 12 tracks, including The Wailing Souls' 'Bredda Gravidicious', Bunny Wailer's 'Battering Down Sentence', Freddie McGregor's 'Joggin'', Judy Mowatt's 'Black Woman' and Sugar Minott's 'Rub-A-Dub Sound', a Taxi recording from last year. The curiosity is Augustus Pablo's 'King Tubby Meets the Rockers Uptown', a totally different track from the title number on the LP of the same name. Pablo's penchant for remixing and renaming his

recordings may have caused confusion. Be that as it may, nobody should be without this one.

The same applies to DJ's, containing tracks from 1972 to 1984. The album charts the evolution of the DJ style, from the strident primitiveness of U-Roy, widely regarded as the 'Father' of DJ toasting, to the rapid-fire Mike Chanter (or M.C.) style of Papa Levi's 'Mi God Mi King'. The M.C. fashion is setting the pace for toasting, and it's the British performers who have excelled at it in the past year. Other featured artists include Yellowman, Michigan and Smiley, Eek A Mouse, Dillinger and rising teenage star Billy Boyo. This one will mash it up!

Lovers Rock is extremely popular with New Zealand listeners, who enjoy the sweet singing of the likes of Winston Reedy, Ruddy Thomas and Susan Cadogan. Others find it a little saccharine. The LP has yet to arrive here, so judgement must be reserved.

Ditto the Dub LP, *A Dub Experience*, consisting of remixes of various Sly and Robbie riddims. If it matches their collaboration with Prince Jammy dubbing Black Uhuru, it should be just fine.

Also still unsighted is a Burning Spear collection. However, a scan through the three island LP's released by the original trio and Winston Rodney solo shows a wealth of moving devotional music which remains peerless.

So there you have it: a veritable feast of Jah Music, with something to accommodate all tastes. Jamaica, despite its small size, poverty and civil unrest, continues to pour out a staggering amount of music. Artists like Sugar Minott and Dennis Brown tend to have at least two current LP's charting, usually on different labels. The quality, however, remains uniformly high. Open your ears, and your heart and mind will follow.

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