

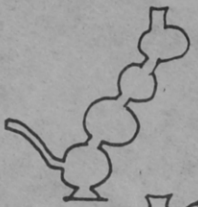
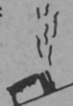
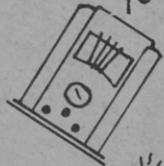
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STIFF'S DOUBLE D.



Meeting one of your heroes is an unnerving experience. There's that fear that you're going to encounter someone who's disappointingly dull or amazingly arrogant. It's almost as tough as learning the truth about Santa Claus.

Desmond Dekker I have adored for years. 'The Israelites' was one of the first singles I ever owned. Twelve years on, the sweet simplicity of that song is as charming as ever.

This man, don't forget, helped Bob Marley along the road to success. Desmond worked with Marley in a welding shop in Kingston, and persuaded him to record his first song for Jack Beverly's studios.

Desmond recalls those days without bitterness, though he's never achieved the commercial success that Marley did.

"Bob never ease up the pressure," says Desmond, "he just keep going and going and going."

"We are good friends. We play football and cricket together. But there was something else about Bob. I knew he was a very good writer, and I told him so, and said he was going to make it. I felt so good when he did."

"I am praying for him now." (This interview was done a couple of months before Marley's death.)

"I started professional singing when I was about 15 years old. I started very early because I love singing. I usually go to a lot of concerts, but I never think I can sing well enough to make a record to please other people."

"My colleagues at work said 'Des, you can sing.' I was always singing with the radio, and they said 'Why don't you give it a go?' I decided I had nothing to lose, so I went to Beverly's Records. My first song was called 'Honour Your Father And Mother.' I sang that song to Lesley Kong, and he loved it, and invited me to a recording session the following week."

"I record the song, and I am astonished that it became a number one hit. I didn't believe it at the time because I was still welding, and had only one test to do, to get my certificate."

"Kong wanted me to sign a recording contract, so I asked my boss at the welding shop if I could do this, and come back to finish my course if it didn't work out. He said that was OK."

Desmond went back into the studios and recorded three more songs with the Beverly's house band, the All Stars, which included Dennis Brown, Toots and Jimmy Cliff. If you have an original copy of 'The Israelites', flip it over and

you'll find an instrumental called 'The Man', recorded by that same band. A collectors' item now, and you can't borrow mine.

Desmond soon started writing his own songs, and shifted to Trojan records. 'The Israelites' was recorded in 1969, going to number one in Jamaica. It managed the same feat four months later in Britain and Europe. A touring band, the Aces, was formed, and Desmond started flitting back and forth between Britain and Jamaica. The follow-up, 'It Mek', was icing on the cake.

But tragedy struck in 1971, when Kong, who was also Desmond's manager, died of heart failure. His loss to reggae was incalculable, and to Desmond it was devastating. Trojan also went bust, and he didn't record for another three years. He tried some sessions with Creole, which took over Trojan, but he didn't get along with the people.

"They never sit down and talk with you, like Lesley did. They always say 'Do this and do that', and I don't like this because it never works."

So Desmond went it alone, playing concerts in Britain and Europe, keeping himself in the public eye.

The resurgence of Ska around 1979 brought Desmond Dekker back to recording. He recorded a demo for Vic Carey at London's Chalk Farm studios, then took it to Dave Robinson of Stiff Records. Robinson had recently signed Madness, and was well aware of the influence Desmond had had on Ska in its formative years.

They recorded an album of Dekker standards in a ska vein, called *Black And Dekker*. Who better to sing ska, after all, since he was there when it started? Desmond also did two concerts with Madness, and the kids welcomed him as a hero.

Robinson later introduced Desmond to Robert Palmer, and before long, the two were working together at Compass Point, Nassau, using many of the musicians that Palmer works with on his own albums.

"It was just like old times," says Desmond. "We decided to try a different LP from everything I had done before. I didn't want to sound like Marley, or any other singer."

"I can play every instrument, and so can Robert, and we both sing well. I know that my fans expect most of the time to hear reggae from me. I wanted to give them something different as well. I want to be versatile. I can sing soul, I can sing opera if I've got to."

"I've been writing over the past five years, but I haven't been recording. I've got stacks and stacks of tapes, and this LP is just a sample of what's to come."

Long live Double D.
Duncan Campbell

'Go For It' Winners

Winners of the Festival Records' Stiff Little Fingers competition were Guy Soolley (Christchurch), Brian Milne (Wainuiomata), Neil Beatie (Northcote), Brent O'Donnell (Dunedin) and Tim Burchall (Whangarei). They win Stiff Little Fingers' new album, *Go For It*. The band (from left to right) are Henry Cluney, Ali McMordie, Jake Burns and Jim Reilly.



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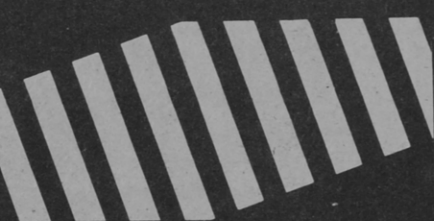
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