

# Mighty Fashion

On a cool Saturday afternoon in October, 2004 Lady Saw breezes into the ornate lobby of San Francisco's Triton Hotel. On a promotional tour for her CD, *Strip Tease*, the Grammy-winning dancehall singer/DJ turns more than a few heads – she's wearing jeans, a cream-colored cashmere sweater and Chanel shades. Her hair is coiffed in a sleek black ponytail and bangs, and she wears a hint of Thierry Mugler's Angel, one of her favorite scents... On a different day, Lady Saw performs at Reggae Sunsplash in a dress from her favorite boutique, L'Impasse in New York.



## by Shelah Moody

Contemporary reggae and dancehall artists like Lady Saw are not only socially and politically conscious, they are arguably some of the most well-dressed and fashion-conscious people in the music industry.

Today's reggae performers are embracing roots and culture-driven labels such as Tuff Gong Clothing (headed by Rohan Marley), Catch A Fire (headed by Cedella Marley), RasJudah, LRG, Ipath Footwear, Cooyah, Livity Outernational, Live Mechanics, Akua Angel, Pure Anywear and Riddim Driven (derived from VP Records).

On and off stage, artists are also flashing high-end labels such as Gwen Stefani's reggae influenced line L.A.M.B. (Love Angel Music Baby), and Damon Dash's Rocawear. It is not uncommon to see DJs Beenie Man and Bounty Killer perform in pricey fits – suits à la Louis Vuitton and Dolce and Gabbana.

## Marion "Lady Saw" Hall

Marion Hall, a.k.a. Lady Saw ([www.ladysaw.net](http://www.ladysaw.net)), is a reggae fashion icon. Since her first album *Lover Girl* was

released in 1994, her style has morphed from raunchy to sophisticated. Saw's current *Walk Out* (VP Records) deals with topics such as externally defined standards of beauty and her own struggles with infertility.

Saw's first single, "The World's Most Prettiest," produced by Sly and Robbie, is aimed at empowering women.

"It's mostly about women who have low self esteem," said Saw. "I don't think that if you don't have a straight nose, you're not beautiful. I may not be flawless like a supermodel, but I'm beautiful and I love myself. I'm telling women to love themselves and love what God has created. This album is a beautiful album. I'm singing more on this one, because people have been asking me to sing more."

In terms of fashion, Saw said that pieces of her wardrobe are often selected by James Goring of VP Records. "He chooses whatever I should wear for most of my photo and video shoots," said Saw, who hails from St. Mary, JA. "Even when I'm in Jamaica, I call him and tell him that I'm doing a video and that I need a hoodie or something, and he gets me some crazy nice things."

On stage at Reggae Sunsplash 2006 in Ocho Rios, JA, Saw rocked the mic in a dress from L'Impasse, a fashionable boutique in Chelsea in New York City.

"I shop at L'Impasse a lot. I love their clothes," said Saw. "Whenever I'm doing a show like Sunsplash or Sumfest, that's where I get my clothes. Even when I'm in Jamaica, James knows what to buy there for me. Also, on the shoot for my video *Infertility*, I'm wearing clothes from L'Impasse."

Like Carrie Bradshaw, the lead character in HBO's *Sex and the City*, Saw has a passion for nice shoes – from Gucci to Nine West – as long as they look good. Saw is also a fan of Stefani's L.A.M.B. line, since she is partially responsible for her Grammy-winning collaboration with No Doubt on their 2002 single "Underneath It All."

"I love her shoes," said Saw. "I bought a couple of pairs recently. I also got a bag with Jamaican colors, green and yellow and black. (Stefani) is one talented girl!"

Saw and her producer and longtime love, Lloyd "John John" James, Jr., have adopted three children together. She said John John does have an occasional say in what she puts on. "He likes jean shorts and sneakers, but not short shorts," said Saw, who hopes to design her own line of lingerie one day. "I'm covering up now, why? Because I eat late at night and I'm getting a bulge in the belly! I'm not wearing all those skimpy things like I used to, but I'm still sexy!"

### Culture: Like Father, Like Son

In August, 2006, the reggae industry lost one of its finest singers and songwriters, Joseph Hill, founder of the conscious reggae trio, Culture, who produced classics such as "Two Sevens Clash," "I'm Not Ashamed," "Calling Rastafari" and "Natty Dread Taking Over." (See [www.consciousparty.com/joehilltributebook.html](http://www.consciousparty.com/joehilltributebook.html).) Joseph Hill was also a fashion icon known for his natty, custom-made suits, many of them designed by his wife, Pauline Hill.

During his 2006 performance at the Sierra Nevada World Music Festival, Hill made a grand impression in a plaid electric blue suit with matching chapeau, despite the heaviness of the summer heat.

"He was a person who was always well dressed," said Hill's son, Kenyatta, who toured with Culture as their sound engineer and filled in as lead singer after his father died.



**Kenyatta Hill would be married wearing jeans on the beach.**



**Luciano is majestic.**



**David Hinds models an African outfit designed by Adamah Fulani of Oakland, CA.**

"From the hat to the shoes, he was all matched," said Kenyatta. "I just loved to see him in that long red suit. That was one of my favorites. I had to go and get one just like it."

Kenyatta Hill, who was seen wearing a black Pure Anywear hoodie at the 2007 Santa Cruz Daze Festival in Santa Cruz, CA, admitted that his style is more casual. For instance, he said he would get married on the beach in a nice shirt, some jeans and a pair of Timberland boots.

Asked what it was like following the footsteps of his legendary father, Kenyatta, who has been praised for helping keep the band going in the wake of their tragic loss said: "Sometimes, words can't explain. It just goes by emotion. To stop and think about how much good times my dad and I spent over the years is priceless. For me to be trying to fill his shoes right now is an honor. It's also very stressful because those are very big shoes to be filled. It's hard at times, but I love it. Over the years, I've fed on his music and I've listened carefully, because within every song there's a message."

### David Hinds, Steel Pulse

David Hinds, founder and lead singer of Steel Pulse, the Grammy winning roots rockers from Birmingham, England ([www.steel-pulse.com](http://www.steel-pulse.com)), said he prefers to wear African attire when he performs. Hinds and Steel Pulse have produced classics such as *Babylon the Bandit*, *True Democracy*, *Earth Crisis*, *Handsworth Revolution* and most recently, *African Holocaust*.

"Our music is all to do with Afrocentrism," said Hinds from his dressing room backstage at the 2007 Ragga Muffins Festival in San Francisco. "It's all to do with how we reflect on Africa and I just dress accordingly. African clothing has a lot of panache to it and zest in colors. Nothing seems more striking on stage as when you wear flashes of African colors."

Hinds said Steel Pulse also gets endorsements from trendy sportswear companies such as Nike, Fila and Adidas. He provided insight into the popularity of khaki and military fatigues worn by reggae artists such as Luciano, Damian and Stephen Marley, Bushman and Tanya Stephens:

"We've always been wearing army fatigues. When we started out as Steel Pulse in the late '70s, we dressed in different

attire according to what we were presenting. Our keyboardist, Selwyn Brown, was always wearing army fatigues at the time. So it's nothing new, it's in vogue right now, it's in fashion and everybody's adapted to it. A year from now, all that's gonna phase out into something else. Besides, we are living in a war zone right now, so why not be prepared for it?"

So, will we ever see David Hinds in a Versace suit on stage? "I don't think so," replied the dread. "Unless it's free."

### Dubz Browne: Bringing Sexy Back

When you're performing alongside dancehall DJ Shaggy, a.k.a., Mister Lova Lova, you've gotta look good! Guitarist Robert "Dubwise" Browne has been playing with Shaggy for years and in 2004 released his solo instrumental album *Birth*. His next CD will be a tribute to the fathers of reggae: Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and Jimmy Cliff. As a solo artist, Browne has performed at Air Jamaica Jazz and Blues Festival (2005 and 2007), Reggae Sunsplash 2006, Christopher's (a jazz club in Kingston), Redbones blues café and The Village Cafe (Kingston, JA). Last year, Browne opened for Shaggy when he was on tour in Japan ([www.myspace.com/robertdubwise](http://www.myspace.com/robertdubwise)).

With his lean, muscular frame, flowing dreads, tank tops, silk shirts, form-fitting jeans and fedoras, "Dubz," as he is called, is definitely bringing sexy back.

"Usually I like wearing nice simple denim jeans, black boots or my leather Converse," said Browne. "Then I'd go with a long-sleeved shirt – something a little shiny that looks good under the lights. If not the long sleeves, something with no sleeves at all. And of course, head gear – I like wearing hats."

### Pure Anywear

Speaking of cool, the low-keyed, Kingston-based Richard Small, chief sound engineer for Bunny Wailer, is a fan of the Pure Anywear line.

"I love it," said Small. "It's new and innovative with really bold moves. Jamaicans would say, 'sell off dem ting a gwaan good.' Loosely translated: Pure is a winner. And not just because their clothing is made of organic cotton and hemp."

"Grizz," owner and founder of Pure Anywear ([www.pureanywear.com](http://www.pureanywear.com)), said he was working in the summer and had winters off and needed something besides snowboarding to do during winter. He decided to start his own clothing line focusing on fabrics that are environmentally conscious and grown in a sustainable organic way.

"I concentrated on hemp and the different blends with hemp," said Grizz. "I was raised in Southern California, then moved to Lake Tahoe for many years. I grew up surfing, skating and always was into music – especially reggae. After going to a lot of concerts and festivals I liked the good positive vibes of reggae and especially the reggae-influenced culture that I experienced best at reggae festivals."

Along with Bunny Wailer's band, Virgin Islands reggae artists such as Midnite, Ras Attitude, Abja, Army, Tuff Lion, Niyorah, Ras Bumpa, Pressure, Lady Passion and Ancient King



**Ras Mugga in Live Mechanics**  
By Justine Ketola

## Flash It: Reggae Style N' Fashion Goes Mainstream

by Justine Ketola

Fashion houses anxious to get exposure provide reggae artists, musicians and DJs with samples of garments, hats and accessories, so they can "profile" in the goods with style and offer their subtle endorsement.

Reggae fans come out to shows and festivals decked out in their red, gold and green finery, which is often made from textiles imported from Ethiopia and other faraway lands. Some sport "jah soldier" wear in khaki or camouflage, often stitching patches with Rasta messages to their suits.

Companies such as Satori and Pure

Anywear use hemp and other sustainable materials, combined with Rasta and reggae imagery, and incorporate these in skateboard clothing that appeals to the prideful identity and natural lifestyle of many in the community.

Skate and snowboard companies create designs directed to the tastes of their riders who can choose to ride in reggae style on ites gold and green-themed boards.

Livity Outernational combines fair trade and sustainable materials with Rasta and rude boy style to create dozens of items that have found their way into Whole Foods, Nordstrom, Urban Outfitters and other high-end fashion outlets. Bobo-ites striped hats made exclusively for Roots Canada bear the standard Livity label, bearing its message, "Wisdom, Knowledge and Overstanding."

Mainstream clothier, Live Mechanics, used the bling approach in 2006 with brightly colored sports jackets that include metallics and sequins amidst lions of Judah and reggae-themed inscriptions and photomontages. Pictured here is a dashiki-inspired jacket, polo shirt and jeans ensemble, part of the summer '07 line.

have been wearing Pure Anywear hemp and organic cotton pieces on stage. Anthony B, Warrior King, Steven Marley's and Ziggy Marley's bands, and Toots and the Maytals also have his designs. Grizz designed a shirt exclusively for conscious reggae singer Prezident Brown with the Pure Logo.

"Pure Anywear is all about spreading the positive vibes and keeping the positive energy flowing," said Grizz. "I support the one love philosophy, sustainable living and keeping it all in balance. Pure Anywear is contributing to this by producing clothing from sustainable materials and hauling it around in a trailer pulled by a bio-diesel truck. Reggae music and culture is having a positive impact on mainstream fashion. It has always been a real big influence on surf wear and is now becoming very popular in skate and snowboard fashion. Red, gold and green are quite fashionable."

### Supreme Women

The women of reggae reigned supreme at Reggae Sunsplash 2006 in Ocho Rios, JA. Actress and Howard University student, Donisha Prendergast, daughter of Sharon Marley and granddaughter of Bob and Rita, modeled a hand-knit halter and mini skirt from the Jamaican Cooyah line, established in 1987 by Homer Bair and Susan Kreitman ([www.cooyah.com](http://www.cooyah.com)). Marcia Griffiths, dressed in a fluffy yellow gown, reminded one of a lemon meringue pie. Dancehall divas such as Saw, Macka Diamond, Tanya Stephens and Ce'Cile flashed ample cleavage, rhinestones and flowing tresses.

### Ce'Cile

"My personal style is classy badgirl," said Ce'Cile, known for her hit singles "Changes" and "Can You Do the Work?" a duet with Sean Paul. "I try to show my extroverted on-stage persona in my dressing, and of course, the bad gyal alter ego, but I try to remain as classy as possible."

Ce'Cile, who works with her personal stylist, Dexter Pottinger, said she feels her sexiest in a pair of stunning heels.

"Now those hot heels have given me a pinched nerve, so I'm sporting sneakers



**Bad gyal, Ce'Cile** Courtesy of Ce'Cile



**Luna Angel and Moese Angel modeling Akua Angel** Courtesy of Akua Angel Designs



**Writer Shelah Moody wears a Forest ensemble from Gwen Stefani's L.A.M.B. line, purchased at Nordstrom's Rack. Vest: \$69.97. Skirt: \$49.97. Dressing like a rock star: Priceless.** By Christie Sinlao

now, which was weird at first, but now gives me so much freedom to move," said Ce'Cile. "I'm loving it. If it's not a long performance I'll still wear heels, but anything over half an hour, it's back to my sneaks. I honestly try to be sexy for the stage – that has always been my thing. Even as a spectator/fan of other artists, I really appreciate it when they are hot and looking good, along with singing my favorite songs. So I try to look sexy, but still feeling as comfortable as possible."

Ce'Cile's current singles include "Waiting" and "Jamdown" on the Jamdown rhythm from Danger Zone. The Japanese version of her album *Badgyal* will be released this summer ([www.myspace.com/cecile](http://www.myspace.com/cecile)). Ce'Cile commented on the international influence of reggae music and culture on the fashion industry: "I think dancehall fashion and Jamaican colors have really exploded over the years, from as far back as I can remember, from Shabba Ranks' day. But it really blew up when Sean Paul went mainstream. At some point I was really tired of the Jamaican colors and I refused to wear them because it got so typical. Now I try to incorporate them nicely in my own outfits but not so much that it's blatant."

### Luna Angel

In terms of fashion, reggae vocalist Luna Angel, who released her debut album *Move with Me* on her independent label in 2005 ([www.lunaangel.com](http://www.lunaangel.com)), aims to project an image of respect and cultural pride. Luna Angel has toured Europe and the U.S., and has opened for artists such as India Arie, the Wailers and Ozomatli. Angel's wardrobe is coordinated by her mother, Mendocino-based Jamaican designer Akua Angel, who began creating clothing influenced by reggae music and culture in England in the 1970s. Some of Akua Angel's popular pieces include tube tops trimmed with Rasta-inspired colors, wrap-around skirts bearing the image of the Lion of Judah and, of course, jackets.

"I don't want to be known as an artist who uses their body to replace their talent," said Luna Angel. "I am about the music more than what the eyes can see."

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## Catch a Fire

Cedella Marley ([www.catchafireclothing.com](http://www.catchafireclothing.com)) and Rohan Marley have carried the legacy of their father, Bob Marley – the universal icon for reggae music – into the fashion world. Their aim is to spread a message of global consciousness. Rohan Marley, a former professional football player, launched the Tuff Gong Clothing line in 2005 ([www.tuffgongclothing.com](http://www.tuffgongclothing.com)).

“My family wanted to create an entity with garments that would represent to people what we are all about,” said Rohan, Tuff Gong Clothing’s head designer. “Being that my sister and

myself were partaking in fashion, we wanted to have a reflection in the marketplace that came from the roots. A lot of people have been running around with green, gold and red. We do appreciate them promoting our roots and our heritage, but we wanted to bring it from a true place. We have Catch A Fire and we have urban street brands called Burning and Nice Time. Zion Rootswear is also one of ours. We also have a designer line called Tuff Gong Gold: Relics of Antiquity, which was inspired by the artwork from the Ethiopian Orthodox churches.”

“It was inspired by angels – we got so tired of all the skulls and bones that we wanted to promote the priests and the prophets,” said Rohan. “All the apparel is created by Cedella and I. We keep the focus on the family. We hired some great designers to work with us who are helping to bring the message across. We have some affiliation with Adidas and a couple of others. We are trying to do our best in making our product the highest quality from a good price point. The fabrics we use are combed cotton, cashmere and Japanese denim and all those good things. The keys for Tuff Gong are comfort and a good quality fit. There is great technical work in everything – from the start to finish. And it’s also hot!”

Rohan said he plans to launch a line of Tuff Gong children’s clothing, as well as skater apparel called SkateTuff. Rohan and Cedella design the stage wear for their brothers, Ziggy, Stephen, Damian and Julian and their respective bands, including the popular 1 Love military-style jackets. Rohan said his jackets represent a disciplined, focused way of life and the love of the Almighty.

Incidentally, Rohan is married to Grammy winning singer/songwriter Lauryn Hill, who helped introduce reggae fashion to mainstream culture following the release of her CD *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* in the late ‘90s.

In terms of designers, Rohan’s influences include Ralph Lauren, Japanese designer Yohji Yamamoto and Stephano Aldigheri, who worked with Tuff Gong Clothing for three seasons, but his foremost fashion influence, was his father, Bob Marley.

“He was a stylish man,” said Rohan. “He wore a lot of good fitting clothes, militaryesque with a safari vibe, with a nice flavor of His Majesty (Emperor Haille Selassie) with the khakis and the kingly inspiration. My designs are intended to make a man feel like a king and be strong. We want women to be the queens and the empresses they are. We want to bring out the strength and the best in you, meaning when you put the gear on, you should feel uplifted.” ☆



**Ziggy Marley sports Tuff Gong clothing line which appeals far and wide.**

Courtesy of Tuff Gong

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