

MySpace | Is a Virtual Treasure Chest | for Reggae Lovers |

by Felicia Kelly

As fans of reggae music, many of us share the quest to discover new music, keep abreast of current rhythms and latest trends. What was nearly impossible in the early 1980s for me growing up in Fargo, ND is now accessible on a widespread basis through a small but powerful cord coming out of the wall, commonly known as the "internet connection."

While the youthful generation has been the target for social networking sites, the scope of the impact of this virtual meeting place has exceeded expectations on every level. Over the past few years when I heard about MySpace, I never really related to it or thought of it as being part of my world. I was in for a big surprise when a coworker suggested that I start my own page. Outside basic office applications, I had no experience with building websites. I thought this whole thing was for kids and completely out of my realm. HTML was a foreign, unpronounceable word for a concept that eluded me. As I crawled onto the information superhighway, hoping I wouldn't get hit by an express route minibus, I was astonished by what I discovered.

To my great delight, I found that creating a MySpace page was as simple as filling in an online application. It's all in a template form so there aren't a lot of variables involved until you start to put the finishing touches on the look of your site. The incredible thing on MySpace is that you can really craft your page to reflect your perspective; the template provides a chance to list favorite music, books and even get as specific as who you would like to meet. The look of your page can be created through the simple cutting and pasting of some code dropped right into the boxes on the template. Fancy slide shows and world maps can be added with the same cut-and-paste technique.

With the advent of digital technology, a previously unimaginable community was born. Lo and behold! From Brazil to Estonia, the reggae community is vibrant and thriving and showcasing the culture, belief system, music and theology of Rastafari in a most magnificent way. A community of music lovers that was long separated by locale and access now has a common "cyber" meeting ground. MySpace has become a forum where you can discover reggae music coming out of all four corners of the earth with a mere click. It is so energizing and hopeful to see so many like-minded individuals representing on this level and sharing information and insights, albeit in a virtual context.

MySpace is also gaining credibility and grabbing the attention of the record industry with its ability to create widespread awareness for bands. There are over 45,626 sites that list reggae in their genre of definition, and the artists are defined by the category of unsigned, indie or major label. A special feature is the ability to see the top-ranked artists based on the traffic that is generated by their site. You can also search for friends or artists in three different categories: by name, display name or email address.

Now, there is a virtual sonic candy store delivered to your home and it really is amazing! With endless choices, it is easy to liken the experience to standing at the counter of your favorite store as the DJ spins, listening to new singles and new versions on the latest riddims. In this new cyber environment, an evening can take you across the globe listening to new sounds and songs; some that speak to the heart and some that bring out the Simon Cowell in all of us. It isn't hard to get lost surfing pages for hours, finding music ranging from the completely obscure to old school gems that warm the heart on the first note.

Artists have an opportunity to communicate directly with their fan base without the high cost of conventional marketing and fans have unlimited exposure to music which may have been dictated in the past by their access to specialty record outlets or by the taste of the local club and radio DJs. In many ways, this site is affecting the entire paradigm of the music industry. As never before, the artist is in an excellent position to directly impact their career through this visibility. Having a MySpace page is completely free and can be utilized to generate bookings and sell music and you can set the whole thing up in an hour or two. In this unique viral networking environment, informational outreach efforts are received with more interest and enthusiasm than when an artist tries to market to an unknown audience. The process of 'requesting friends' allows MySpace members the option of not accepting those artists who aren't of interest.

By establishing a direct relationship with the fans or 'friends,' a band can build a much stronger and long-lasting base. The artist or band can develop the relationship with people who want to attend shows by keeping them informed of current events, press exposure and upcoming gigs. In terms of impact to the artist, it is possible to use a MySpace

player or other hosted players on your page that will deliver paid digital downloads thereby generating immediate revenue. The ideal result will be that the fans will support artists through purchasing music and merchandise.

It also provides the better-known artists a safe way to interact with their fans. Many artists send out bulletins supporting causes, and other artists and write blogs keeping their 'friends' informed of their latest runnings. Don't be surprised if you send a message to your favorite artist through MySpace and they actually read it and respond.

Perhaps the next time you sit down at your computer, you will take a few minutes to check out MySpace and explore unknown territories and meet friends from all over. You could even start with www.myspace.com/reggae-festival-guide. From dancehall to ska, you are sure to find it. If you just don't know where to start, visit me at www.myspace.com/filluv. Check out my space and friends: one click leads to another. ☆