

On to Zion REGGAE PASSINGS

by Justine Ketola

BRENT DOWE

Brent Dowe passed away January 29, 2006 after suffering a heart attack. Dowe – along with Tony Brevett, Trevor McNaughton, Brimwell Brown and Robert Cogle – comprised one of reggae's



Brent Dowe By Robert Oyugi

finest vocal quintets of the mid-1960s, known as the Melodians.

The late '60s era of Kingston City magic found the group making moves to reggae's foundation studios. Beginning at Studio One, on to Treasure Isle and then to Sonia Pottinger, the Melodians produced a group of hits, the two most widely known being "Rivers of Babylon" and "Sweet Sensation."

Both these tunes found their way onto the soundtrack of the pivotal reggae epic film, *The Harder They Come*. A selector's choice of harmonic songs from spiritual folk style to yearning love songs, the music of the Melodians signifies some of the most vital tunes from the era.

Brent Dowe recorded a formidable body of work as a solo artist, including a full-length album for Pottinger called, *Build Me Up*. Dowe also frequented Niney "The Observer's" studio, but it was the Lee Perry-produced "Down Here in Babylon" that had the farthest reach to the reggae massive.

Trevor McNaughton recalls his partner and friend: "I remember Brent as a peaceful, loving person. It's four decades now since the Melodians have been together, so you know that hurt, that pain that I feel inside for Brent Dowe, that sweet natural-going person who loved everyone and liked to have a good time."*

The Melodians Tony Brevette and Trevor McNaughton continue to blaze the torch for reggae's foundation artists without

the presence of their partner and friend. "The work has to go on, it not going to end although one is gone because we live closer than even with own brother and sister," Tony Brevett said about the Melodians.*

The group has crisscrossed the world several times, filling up people's souls at points as far and wide as California, the UK and Germany. For more information on upcoming tour dates and their forthcoming new CD release, please visit: www.myspace.com/themelodians.

*Excerpts from the story by Basil Waters that appeared in February 12, 2006 *Jamaica Observer*.

DESMOND DEKKER

One of ska and reggae music's most powerful singers and live performers, Desmond Dekker, along with his group the Aces, became the first reggae artist to reach #1 on the UK charts and other top charts around the world with the seminal song, "The Israelites" or "Poor Me Israelites" as it is sometimes named. This was a 1968 boom shot that called out to the archetypal sufferer to stay strong amidst life's perils and tribulations.

*Get up in the morning, slaving for bread, sir
So that every mouth can be fed
Poor me Israelites*

*My wife and my kids, they packed up and leave me
Darling, she said, I was yours to be seen
Poor me Israelite*

*Shirt them a tear up, trousers is gone
I don't want to end up like Bonnie and Clyde
Poor me Israelite*

Born Desmond Dacres in 1941, it was his writing in melodic structure and lyrics in songs like his first hit, "Honor Your Father and Mother," and later, "You Can Get It If You Really Want" (the main theme song with a vocal performed by Jimmy Cliff in *The Harder They Come*) that carried the Rasta tune: a refrain that beckoned, exploring reggae's true healing essence; a promise of redemption and a message to give us all faith.

The majority of his adult life was spent in London, after he relocated from Kingston, JA in 1941. He became an icon in the two-tone era of ska as it took shape in the UK. Ska – and its influence in the UK – was reggae in the Diaspora; it was through this movement that the message of racial harmony was spread. His influence on the likes of fellow Brits such as

Elvis Costello, the Beatles, the Police and the Rolling Stones is evident. Desmond Dekker passed away after a heart attack at his home on May 25, 2006.

LOUISE "MISS LOU" BENNETT-COVERLY

Louise Bennett-Coverly passed away in Toronto, Canada on July 26, 2006. She was a Jamaican poet and activist and she remains a household name in Jamaica, a cultural icon who celebrated and preserved the culture through the spoken word.

Miss Lou was a tremendous influence on the music community; her gift for poignancy and wit in the words and delivery of cultural stories, dramatic role-play and parables permeated the climate during reggae's formative years.

Born September 7, 1919, Miss Lou's first dialect poem was written when she was 14 years old. A British Council scholarship took her to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art where she studied in the 1940s.

After graduation she worked with repertory companies in large productions as well as in intimate revues all over England. On her return to Jamaica she taught drama to youth and adult groups for social welfare agencies and for the University of the West Indies Extra Mural Department.

She lectured extensively in the U.S and the UK on Jamaican folklore and music and represented Jamaica all over the world. She married Eric Winston Coverly in 1954 (who died in 2002) and she is survived by one stepson and several adopted children.

Her contribution to Jamaican cultural life was such that she was honored with: the M.B.E., the Norman Manley Award for Excellence (for the Arts), the Order of Jamaica (1974), the Institute of Jamaica's Musgrave Silver and Gold Medals for distinguished eminence in the field of Arts and Culture, and an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters from the University of the West Indies in 1983. In September 1988, her composition *You're Going Home Now*, which she wrote for the movie *Milk and Honey*, won a nomination from the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television for best original song.

As Kingston native and Jamaican chef Patrick Lewis told *Reggae Festival Guide*, "She help make patois get exposure. She take it up and all over the world in a comedic form." As he reminisced about Miss Lou he said, "We used to participate in her talent contest 'Ring Ding' that was for the youth and it was held in front of the JBC radio station. Every day before the midday news she was heard with her program 'Auntie Roachie Say' which told bits of wisdom from an imaginary aunt."

In 1998 she received the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters from York University, Toronto, Canada. The Jamaican government appointed her Cultural Ambassador-at-Large for Jamaica. On Jamaica's independence day, August 6, 2001, Bennett-Coverly was appointed Member of the Order of Merit for her distinguished contribution to the development of the Arts and Culture.

Although she lived in Toronto for the last decade of her life, she received recognition from expatriate West Indian communities throughout the world.

Described as "Jamaica's leading comedienne," Miss Lou was a poet who was able to get to the essence of Jamaican culture and verbalize its truths. She remains an important contributor to social commentary that reflects the way Jamaicans think, feel and live.

RENEE ROMANO

Renee Romano passed away from a long battle with cancer on July 29, 2006. Renee, along with her husband Elliott Leib, was a founder of Trade Roots Reggae, a San Diego, CA reggae mecca that celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2005 with the concert "Tribute to the Roots."



Renee Romano with Elliott Leib By Justine Ketola

Renee completed her B.A. degree in cultural anthropology and Elliott his M.A. in African studies, both at UCLA. In the summer of 1977, they had plans to do a film/study trip to Cuba to research Abakua, the African-Caribbean variant of the Cross River Ekpe society. Due to the travel restrictions imposed by the economic blockade of Cuba, they rerouted their research to Jamaica. There they found the spiritual songs and teachings of the Rastafarians of the Nyabinghi Order. Following this initial 12-week immersion into Rastafari culture, they edited their Super-8 film footage into the short, *Iles from Mt. Irits*.

In 1978 Renee and Elliott returned to Jamaica to film the 16-mm. documentary *Rastafari Voices* in Kingston and St. Andrew. Edited into two parts, *Prophecy of Youth and Elder* orients the viewer to the salient features of Rastafarian doctrine and livity; part two, *Nyabinghi* is a close-up look at the Heroes' Circle Nyabinghi in Kingston in 1978. This material has served as a great resource for numerous research institutions, including university libraries, cultural community centers and prison libraries.

Renee went on to direct the pioneering video documentary *Rastafari: Conversations Concerning Woman* (1983) recorded in Jamaica while Elliott was a Fulbright scholar attached to the University of the West Indies.

The roots of the promotions side of Renee's reggae journey began while she and Elliott were living in Connecticut. In the

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early '80s, they brought artists like Don Carlos, the Itals, the Roots Radics and the Gladiators to the New Haven, CT area. Over the years, Renee and Trade Roots introduced many great artists to the San Diego area including Earl 16, Jimmy Riley, Carlton Livingston, Johnny Clarke, Leroy Smart, Horace Andy and Cornel Campbell.

For over 20 years, Trade Roots Reggae has been a cornerstone for reggae music lovers in San Diego. As dancehall reggae came in with its harder vocals and rugged rhythms in the late '80s, it became popular to many customers. Despite its appeal, Renee stayed on the path of the original mission of the store noting, "I always told anyone who worked with us not to let a customer leave the store without hearing the roots. I felt that the dancehall thing would come and go, but once people heard roots music, they would be our long time customers... they would become reggae addicts like us."

Trade Roots Reggae emerged as a vibrant force in the live music community, introducing the first Marcus Garvey Day, promoting an annual "Steve Biko Day" for several years in honor of the fallen South African freedom fighter, and producing fundraisers for the local Mumia Abu Jamal coalition. In the '90s, Renee and Elliott also traveled on tour to festivals as vendors, including the annual Reggae Sunsplash tour and the Teva "Spirit of Unity" Tour. Renee's sticker and t-shirt designs became as well known as their store's music and hat selections. In 2006 the store was sold to Orthodox Rueben, one of the long-time staff members of Trade Roots.

Renee was an essential part of her family that includes her three children, Eric, Tanya and Tony, her husband Elliott and two grandchildren.

JOSEPH "CULTURE" HILL

2006 also marked the passing of Joseph "Culture" Hill of the momentous group Culture. His music, stage presence and brilliant wisdom touched the spirit and livity of many, many of us in the reggae community worldwide. He and his band toured tirelessly, performing nearly 200 shows a year. Joseph "Culture" Hill passed away while on tour in Berlin, August 19, 2006. He was an artist whose work and live performance had lyrical depth that were not only intense and rebellious, but also inspiring and fun. As the great teacher and forefather Joe Higgs once described the essence of Hill's great reggae: his music was "light as a feather, heavy as lead."

Born January 22, 1949, Joseph Hill began his musical career as a selector for various sound systems in the Linstead area of Jamaica. He also became the percussionist, and sometimes vocalist, of the Soul Defenders group, based in the same part of St. Catherine. The Soul Defenders cut a number of rhythm tracks at Studio One, and ended up backing many of the artists working for Coxson Dodd during the early 1970s, including Freddie McKay, Dennis Brown, Burning Spear, Horace Andy and Freddie McGregor. Hill began his recording career as a singer at Studio One.



Joseph "Culture" Hill By Bob Salzman

In 1976 Albert Walker approached Joseph Hill about starting a vocal group. The group, which included Kenneth Dayes, launched under the name African Disciples. Hill was lead singer and Dayes and Walker sang harmony. Shortly after their formation, the group began recording at Joe Gibbs' studio, and from that point on the group went by the name Culture. The first single to appear was "This Time," issued on Gibbs' Belmont label. This release was followed by a number of successful hits including "See Them a Come" and "Two Sevens Clash."

To coincide with the year's significance in biblical prophecy, in 1977 Culture released their first full-length album, *Two Sevens Clash* on the Joe Gibbs label. This release was named one of the "50 Coolest Records" by *Rolling Stone* magazine.

In late 1977, Culture began to issue singles on Sonia Pottinger's High Note label. Culture recorded three studio albums with Sonia Pottinger, all of which appeared on the Virgin label in the UK, as well as a dub album. The albums are: *Harder Than the Rest* (1978), *Cumbolo* (1979) and *International Herb* (1979). Culture began to play live with the Revolutionaries, and started to regularly tour in the UK.

Joseph Hill's writing style emerged from the forefront of the 1970's black consciousness movement. His success with this concept during that era has played a central role in the continued presence of revolutionary lyrical content in reggae music. Culture released 26 albums during Joseph Hill's lifetime including those for Shanachie, Heartbeat and VP Records.

Joseph Hill and his band mates toured extensively throughout his 30-year career, making several appearances in Africa including stops in Sierra Leone, Kenya, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Ivory Coast. They also traveled to Israel, Japan, Europe and South America.

When Culture was not on tour, Joseph Hill spent time tending his crops in the Jamaican countryside and recording. The combination of sowing good seeds through the extremely hard work of relentless touring and continuous creative expression resulted in a feast for spirits hungry for the food of righteousness and the vibe of his unique brand of reggae.

Kaati, publisher of *Reggae Festival Guide*, also works in production with concert promoter *Renegade Productions*. She had this to say after many years of association with Joseph and his wife and road manager, Pauline, "Miss P." "Of all the reggae bands that come through, they were the most like family. Joseph was genuinely happy to see us and Miss P would invite us on the bus where she had pots cooking and sit us down for a plate."

As a harmony-centered group, the band Culture still has two original members, Albert Walker and Telford Nelson, who, along with Joseph and Pauline's son, Kenyatta, have continued to tour. Kenyatta performs lead vocals, delivering powerful versions of his father's songs.

For many, Joseph Hill's passing is similar to the passing of Bob "Tuff Gong" Marley. Along with his contemporaries in the practice of Jamaican pocomania revivals, Joseph "Culture" Hill invites us all to get ready to revamp our spirits, calling to us with lyrics that report on the revelations of the time.

A well-visited memorial site has been established by Sista Irie on her Conscious Party community website. Please go to www.consciousparty.com/joehilltributebook.html to express your sentiments.

PERRY HENZELL

Perry Henzell is well known for being the director and writer, with Trevor Rhone, of *The Harder They Come*, which became an international classic after its launch in 1972. Sadly, Perry Henzell died on November 30, 2006 after a long battle with cancer.

Mr. Henzell passed away a day before his last film, *No Place Like Home*, was to be shown at the Flashpoint Film Festival in Negril, JA. Although he wrote several other screenplays, Henzell is best known for the reggae classic *The Harder They Come*, the film that made a superstar out of reggae singer Jimmy Cliff.

The Harder They Come introduced mainstream audiences worldwide to reggae music in all of its rebellious pride. The hero Ivan (played by Jimmy Cliff), a victim of the music business system, offers an antidote towards the practice of payola and unfair business runnings that were rampant in 1970's Kingston.



Perry Henzell directing *The Harder They Come* By Arthur Gorson LAFilm@aol.com

Perry Henzell, a former advertising executive, based the film on the legendary Ivanhoe 'Rhygin' Martin, a notorious "rude boy" and folk hero from the shantytowns of 1940's Kingston. Essential reggae musicians Desmond Dekker, Toots and the Maytals, the Melodians and Jimmy Cliff are all portrayed at work performing in the film.

With the evocative reggae beat beckoning, *The Harder They Come* helped introduce reggae and Jamaican culture to an international audience. It had a major impact overseas where it played in small theaters in North America and Europe, and won "Best New Cinema" at the 1973 Venice Film Festival. A stage version of *The Harder They Come* had a successful run in London in 2006.

Created 12 years after Jamaica gained independence from Britain, the film was first screened at three movie theatres in Kingston for audiences whose obsession with westerns and vigilante justice found a hero with a motorcycle for a horse and a beachfront for the open range.

Perry Henzell lived in Round Hill, St. Elizabeth, JA. His son, Jason and family have Jake's Place, a resort located in Treasure Beach on Jamaica's South Coast. With its fine food and artistic design, it is also the home of the Calabash Literary Festival, founded by Perry's daughter, Justine, with over 200 visitors each year. Mr. Henzell's family includes his wife Sally, son Jason and two daughters, Justine and Toni-Ann, along with four grandchildren. ☆

Justine Ketola is a 20-year veteran in the music business. She is now in her sixth year with the Reggae Festival Guide. Her experience includes marketing, artist bookings, publicity and event production. Justine feels blessed and honored to work in the reggae music genre. She is a producer at KPFK radio, Los Angeles with Chuck Foster's Reggae Central program. She is the Reggae Festival E-Guide editor, and a contributor to Jahworks.org and The Beat magazine. Justine@ReggaeFestivalGuide.com or myspace.com/zionboundmedia