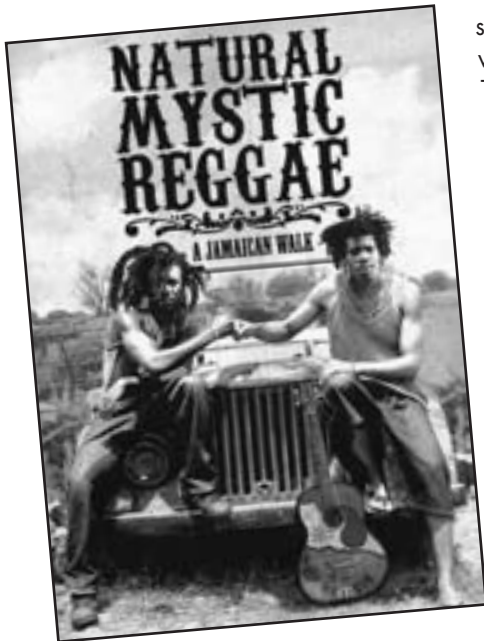


# READINGS FOR REASONINGS

BOOK & DVD  
REVIEWS  
by Chuck Foster

## Natural Mystic Reggae: A Jamaican Walk

2 Good Productions, 2006



This new DVD starts with a video verité stroll through Trenchtown and winds up in the verdant Blue Mountains of Jamaica. There's even a visit to a French reggae festival with Natty King and Groundation! Along the way are, interview snippets from classic performers including Leroy Smart, Freddie McGregor, Jahman Levy, Sister Carol and Ken Boothe; contemporary singers such as Richie Spice, Fantan Mojah, Chezidek,

Doniki and Warrior King, a vintage soundtrack (though you might suspect this is not the music some of the people being filmed are listening to today) and documentary footage of Bob Marley.

All help capture the flavor of the birthplace of reggae. With tour guides like "Chinna" Smith and Kiddus I, we visit Back-A-Wall, Queens, Majestic and the Ambassador Theaters (in various states of disrepair), and hear excellent mention of artists gone by – like Delroy Wilson, Slim Smith and Joe Higgs.

The juxtaposition of artists old and new shows a thread of continuity between the roots era of the seventies, the ska and rock steady that preceded it, and on to the best of the modern purveyors of reggae's gentle and lasting message. Journalist Balford Henry offers his interpretation of Rastafari, as do various Rasta performers. The interview footage is spiced with album covers, historical photos and visits to Studio One, with commentary from King Stitt and others who worked and recorded there. We're shown the buildings that once housed Treasure Isle and Channel One, and visit locations such as Prince Buster's Orange Street, Augustus Pablo's Rockers International and Rupie Edward's record shop. We see Beverley's Records, Idler's Rest,

African Museum (Gregory Isaac's old shop, now transformed into "Candy World") and Dennis Brown's early home. These places are visited like stations of the cross and contemporary inhabitants seem delighted to step out of the way to let the historical locations be filmed.

Some still currently active spots are visited as well: Leggo Studio, Techniques (both the studio and the shop, with a comment from Winston Riley), Carl's Records (including a quick peek at the old Randy's studio upstairs), King Ital Natural Foods Restaurant and Raetown's Oldies Night. All too brief concert footage of Luciano, Ken Boothe, the Twinkle Brothers, the Mighty Diamonds and others reminds us of the reason why all this is important. A moment with the Diamonds as they rock out to their latest recording in the van is priceless, as are live studio visits with the Diamonds and Junior Kelly and the Firehouse Crew.

A new generation of Rasta is treated to a Garnett Silk tribute featuring Sizzla and Turbulence. Artists Anthony B, Derajah and others put a contemporary spin on a movement that continues to have a positive effect on a world that can sorely use one. Bonus special "freestyle" material shows what can happen spontaneously when you carry video recording equipment around active Jamaican studios. A couple of the performances such as Junior Kelly spar Izulah merit further attention. [www.2good.fr](http://www.2good.fr)

## Dub: Soundscapes & Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae by Michael E. Veal

Wesleyan, 2007

Dub – the creative "remixing" of basic tracks that makes the riddim and not the singer the star – is one of the great innovations of Jamaican music. Dub laid the foundation for the DJs of the seventies, drum and bass, dancehall, jungle, hip-hop, house, trance, electronica and all that followed.



Michael E. Veal takes a scholarly approach to the subject in *Dub: Soundscapes & Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae* (Wesleyan, 2007). Though the Western analytical grid has not always served reggae well, Veal does an admirable job on a tough subject and manages to inform, enlighten and entertain along the way. In the closing chapter and coda he treats dub's effects in Germany, the UK and the U.S., and moves beyond the West to reclaim dub for Africa – a move the Rastafarian progenitors of the music being dubbed would celebrate.

Some of the issues grappled with in this work may be of more interest to musicologists in general than fans of dub in particular. Still, the author communicates a deep and rich understanding of music. His enthusiasm for, and immersion in, dub help steer him clear of technical landmines as he goes to the heart of the music.

He draws parallels to freeform jazz, hip-hop, action painting or Zen, ropes in Cage, Stockhausen, collage, Afro-futurism, post-structuralism – and just about anything else you can think of. Yet he's able to explain the firm grasp he has on dub's unique contribution to the music of the world. The book is a tour de force that resonates with the very aspects of dub the author describes so well.

Along the way, Veal treats such related subjects as the sound system, dub plate specials, the relation of dub and the growth of the DJ style. He looks at the roles of musician and producer, the merits of the various studios and the dethroning of roots by raggga. He offers pertinent interview material, including comments from Robbie Shakespeare, Phillip Smart, Sylvan Morris, Scientist, King Jammy, Computer Paul, Mikey Dread and many others. Throughout, he displays a refreshingly thorough grounding in the music, science and available literature. Dozens of significant players like Lee Perry, Dennis Bovell, Errol Thompson and Augustus Pablo are treated in a manner that shows a real knowledge of their contributions. Veal is able to place dub within a broader context in which modern music is a direct result of African influence on Western culture (a post-colonial "transformative strategy").

Though one of dub's greatest attractions is its seeming simplicity, Veal has the rare ability to verbalize the difference between echo, reverb and delay. He can give a technical explanation of equalization or a discourse on dub's subversion of harmonic resolution while remaining true to the feel of the music.

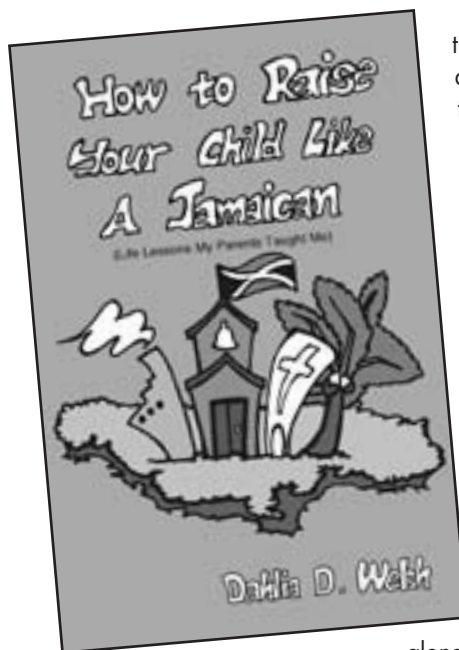
Not exactly light reading – section headings like "Economic Importance of Version-Based Music" might remind you of Roland Barthes' structural analysis of a wrestling match – this work is well worth the effort you put into it. Sections interspersed throughout the book describe and comment on specific dubs, with the largest group rightfully clustered in the section on King Tubby. Veal ably juxtaposes original and dub versions with nuance-filled descriptions, insightful observations and commentary. Reliable notes at the back of the book will help you track down both versions.

Reggae is serious business and dub is as serious as it gets. This book will increase your store of knowledge and place that knowledge in a broader context you might not have considered

before. A "Recommended Listening Appendix" breaks down a virtual soundtrack to the book by engineer; it's a great starting place for those who want to ferret out the subtleties in style, and a compact review for those who think they already know it all. Dub gets the serious treatment it deserves in this, the first full-length book to explore the mystery and magic of this intensely inspired musical form.

## How to Raise Your Child Like a Jamaican (Life Lessons My Parents Taught Me) by Dahlia D. Welsh

Dahlia D. Welsh, 2007



If you've spent any time in Jamaica, or around Jamaicans or their music, you know they are some of the sweetest people on the earth. Jamaicans are not afraid to stand up for their rights or tell you what they think without trying to hurt your feelings or make you feel bad. Dahlia D. Welsh may have been born in America but she was raised a Jamaican in a traditional Jamaican family and she passes

along some of the wisdom she grew up with in *How to Raise Your Child Like a Jamaican (Life Lessons My Parents Taught Me)*. I once bought a slightly risqué album in a Christian thrift store and apologetically said to the embarrassed clerk ringing me up, "It's really not bad by today's standards." Dahlia D. Welsh's wise homilies on life remind me of that lady's response which stuck with me ever since: "I don't go by today's standards."

In a series of vignettes culled from her personal experience, the author sets up stories that serve as both example and precept, and then gently drives them home with the kind of guidance with which her parents drove them home to her. She draws a broader implication as well: the culture handed down from her parents originated in Africa and forms part of a tradition and heritage that goes back to the beginning of all culture. Whether she's talking about money management, diversity, second-hand clothes passed down from two older sisters, or accountability, the advice is aimed squarely at the parent. Being raised a Jamaican means the parent takes the responsibility for teaching the child to be responsible.

Welsh uses Jamaican folk sayings like "every mikkle makes a mukkule," "fire de a mus mus tail," "if a fish could keep him mouth shut he would never get caught" (which also find their

**Continued on page 59**

## Readings for Reasonings

Continued from page 46

way into hundreds of Jamaican songs), as well as a keen sense of human nature and good, old-fashioned common sense. *How to Raise Your Child Like a Jamaican* addresses relevant issues like substance abuse, dealing with success and failure and attitudes about sex and peer pressure. Her practicality and sense of humor encourage every parent to have a firm hand and a strong foundation of values, or risk the consequences. Here is a thoroughly enjoyable guide filled with wisdom and compassion, suitable for raising a child you hope will also go on to spread such virtues. Coming to a bookstore near you soon. [www.dahliadwelsh.com](http://www.dahliadwelsh.com)

### Doors to Reality by Ras Howard Henry

Ras Howard Henry, 2007



Poetry has a long association with reggae, from the Bible-laced lyrics of seventies roots music through the dub poetry of Mutabaruka, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Michael Smith and Yasus Afari, and the contemporary artists like D.Y.C.R who build on these foundations. In *Doors to Reality*, Ras Howard Henry writes poetry that speaks of oppression, poverty, slavery, freedom and joy, and lashes out at the system with uncompromising directness.

Upholding the vision of Marcus Garvey and celebrating the divinity of Haile Selassie I, he measures the distance between their inspiration and the everyday realities encountered as a Jamaican living in the U.S.

Turning the symbols of America – the Statue of Liberty, the White House, the Liberty Bell, the almighty dollar – inside out, Henry recognizes the power inherent in language. In poems like “Who Made the Guns?” “White Face Black Man,” “House of Corruption” and “Hello Mr. Politician,” he strips society’s carefully sown illusions bare. Henry offers a view of the world at odds with the fare presented on nightly TV and in daily press briefings of Orwellian doublespeak. With poems like “Proud to Be Black,” “I Rise” and “A Moment with Nature,” he offers his own positive alternative. No nursery rhymes for easy times, Ras Howard Henry’s *Doors to Reality* open to reveal aspects of immigrant struggle and strife not often told. [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com)

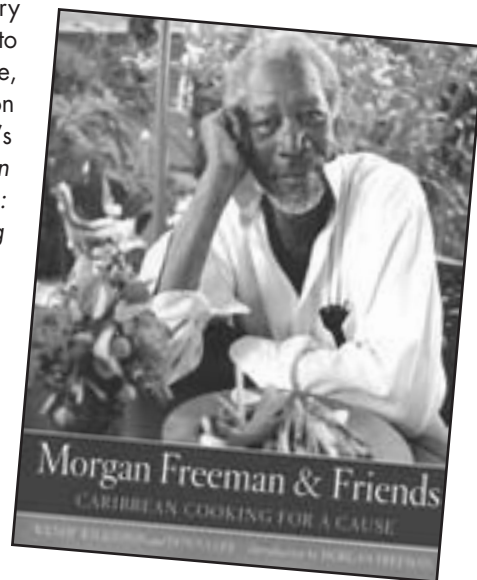
### Morgan Freeman & Friends: Caribbean Cooking for a Cause by Wendy Wilkinson and Donna Lee

Rodale, 2007

From poetry for a purpose to cooking for a cause, Wendy Wilkinson and Donna Lee’s new book *Morgan Freeman and Friends: Caribbean Cooking for a Cause* (Rodale, 2007) is filled with enticing recipes and gorgeous color photos of beautifully prepared food. “Island admirer” contributors include actors Ben Affleck, Tom Hanks and Michael Douglas,

singers Kenny Chesney and Alicia Keys, and some of the best-known executive chefs in and of the Caribbean. The cause they’re cooking for is the Grenada Relief Fund, pledged to rebuild and preserve the island after the devastation of 2004’s Hurricane Ivan. Informative biographies fill you in on what the Caribbean means to the participants, but the proof is in the Antiguan Bread Pudding, the Butter-Poached Spiny Lobster from St. Croix, Jamaican Curried Tofu, Cuban Picadillo and a surprising St. Thomas Cajun Gumbo from the kitchen of Raven Symone.

Instructions from some of the best cooks and restaurants on the islands, celebrations of island living from everyone from Katie Couric to Ben Vereen, and recipes for everything from Rum-Raisin Ice Cream to Snapper Roasted in Banana Leaves with Mango-Black Bean Relish will encourage you to do some tropical tasting of your own. Along the way you’ll learn some surprising facts about some celebrities with special ties to the Caribbean. A section on Hurricane Ivan and its aftereffects, including one family’s stirring story of survival, along with interviews scattered through the book, put a human face to the book’s sui generis. Answering the purpose behind this volume, Morgan Freeman is donating his portion of the proceeds to the Grenada Relief Fund. The recipes themselves bring the islands – from the Bahamas to Virgin Gorda – not just home, but straight into your kitchen. [www.rodalestore.com](http://www.rodalestore.com) ☆



Chuck Foster hosts Reggae Central on KPFK-LA Sunday afternoons from 3-5PM (streaming globally, archived and podcast via KPFK.ORG). He writes the Reggae Update column for The Beat magazine and is the author of *Roots Rock Reggae: An Oral History of Jamaican Music from Ska to Dancehall* (Billboard Books) and can be reached at [cfoster907@yahoo.com](mailto:cfoster907@yahoo.com).