

Irie Reggaelections



Bushman By T. Matsushita

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GREETINGS

Each year we bring out the best in reggae by asking people to share their memories and "reggaelections." This year we posted a request through the *Reggae Festival E-Guide* newsletter that resulted in some great responses from near and far. We hope you enjoy these memories, and we would like to recognize Wendy Russell who edited this selection for several years. Thanks Wendy for all of your contributions to *Reggae Festival Guide*!

Reggae artist Bushman: A Jamaican star in Suriname

The moment I landed in Suriname, South America I knew that this event was going to be one that I would remember. When I got off the plane, I noticed a dozen security men dressed in full black and wearing bulletproof vests. When I realized it was me that they were waiting for, I thought the promoter had overdone things a little.

Nanko was traveling with us and our entire entourage was placed in two cars that drove with one security car in front and one behind. As we're driving, I'm wondering if this is all because of me... am I in some serious danger? Maybe they don't like Jamaicans in this country? Maybe there is a civil war going on?

I finally asked Brian, the promoter, "Are there going to be any problems? Why do you have so much security?" Brian's quick response was, "Oh no, Bushman! We expect no problems! I just want to make sure that you are properly taken care of and that you are safe." The driver added, "It is an honor for us to have you here, Bushman – a long wait for us all that live in Suriname."

The next two days gave me the true feeling of being a star. We were driven around with Brian and the security group. They were all nice, fun people who took their jobs very seriously. We traveled to several different locations for interviews at radio stations, newspapers and cable television stations. The publicity for this show was well-planned and on-the-ball. Everywhere we stopped, we were swarmed by people of all ages. They were so excited to meet Jamaican reggae artists up close and personal.

The night of the show was Saturday, October 28, 2006 at the Robert Nesty Sports Centre. I received a rapturous welcome from the crowd of over 3,000 strong. When I started to sing, I was so surprised that these non-English speaking people were able to sing along with me. They knew all of my songs, word-for-word. They really knew my stuff!

Getting warmed up into my set I went to the front of the stage to interact with this warm and fun loving crowd. I was shocked when I felt hands grabbing around my feet and ankles. There were so many people holding on to me that I was firmly planted in one spot. I could not move. It took the work of two security guards and my manager, Vee, to pry the fans' hands from around my feet and ankles, freeing me up to move around the stage again. This was an overwhelming moment for me. The whole entire trip to Suriname was a time in my career that I felt the life of a star.

Osei Terry Chandler shares the genesis of his reggae journey

My first reggae experience was 'round 1975... I guess. My (still) best friend, Bill Jones, took me to a place on Brooklyn's outskirts, My Father's Mustache. The Mighty Diamonds were playing and I purchased the 12" recording *Africa*.

Same year we saw Burning Spear, still as a trio, at the Felt Forum inside Madison Square Garden in New York City. There was a music store on Flatbush Ave. near St. Marks by the movie theater that still shows movies today, and the shop was going out of business. I purchased almost all of their reggae albums (15 or 20). I moved to South Carolina in '77 and started the Roots Musik Karamu on SC Educational Radio Network with that stash.

Since then, I have presented the Mighty Diamonds, Burning Spear (and his Burning Band) and many, many more including Peter Tosh ('81) for festivals, club dates and concerts – here in the heart of Dixie! The very first reggae band to appear in Charleston, SC was Denroy Morgan and the Black Eagles (May '79) featuring Carlos Garnett on tenor sax at the Piccolo Spoleto Festival. The very last club date that I hosted was with Morgan Heritage ('01 or '02) here at the Music Farm.

The Roots Musik Karamu is still on the air and is now on three stations covering most of the state and heard in parts of NC and Georgia too. I claim it as the "longest running Caribbean music show on the East Coast... from Maine to Miami." No one has been on longer. www.etradio.org

Chi Chi Gwaii speaks of his introduction to Bob Marley

I grew up in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, but it wasn't until I moved to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 1999 that I heard reggae music for the first time. I was around 14 years old when I heard Bob Marley on the radio in Ethiopia, but I didn't really understand the message of truth in his music. It wasn't until I reached the age of 21 and truly listened to the lyrics of "Redemption Song" that I began to understand the reason he sang that type of music. After listening to that song, I felt alive and free like a baby – my spirit



Chi Chi Gwaii

and Bob's spirit came together. His message truly awakened my soul and helped me to pursue and find my own passion for lifting up the people through music. I believe one day me and Bob shall share words together. R.I.P. Bob Nesta Marley.

Heather Holland finds reggae love

I luv reggae – always have and always will. A few years ago I hitchhiked my way to Reggae on the River in Humboldt County, CA. On the last morning of the show this beautiful man walked by me with incense sticking out of his knitted tam hat. I asked him if I could light up one of his incense sticks for him. He looked at me and I looked at him and by the blessings of Jah it was love at first sight that I have never experienced before in my life.

We were mistakenly separated for the rest of the day. I wandered around searching for him for a while and then, feeling silly and love struck, I decided to go and dance my heart out to the closing show of Damian "Junior Gong" Marley. After the show I was walking back to my camp by the river and we walked past each other. We both sensed each other and stopped. It was dark so our eyes weren't working so well but our hearts were. We began walking together and set up our own little cuddle camp on the rocks next to the river. When we woke up he asked me if he could travel with me. I said, "I thought you would never ask."

Neither of us knew where we were going or what we were going to do. We only knew that we were going to spend our time together. And we did. We have been together ever since and we are happily married now with a beautiful two-year old son, Ezekiel Dale Jacob. And yes, we still love reggae and so does our son. If it weren't for reggae music and love, my husband and I would not be together.

Reggae artist Irie Love

I remember the first time I went to Jamaica to record my music in April of 2005. I had to fly all the way from my home in Hawaii to Kingston, JA. It took about 12 hours flying time plus there's a 6-hour time difference. So, to say the least, I was exhausted once we finally touched down on Jamaican soil.

My manager and I stayed at the famous Altamont Court Hotel, where I'm told the artiste Gentleman prefers to stay whenever

he's in town. The first place my manager took me was to Big Ship studios to meet the legendary Freddie McGregor, a longtime friend of my manager. He was so kind and everyone up at Big Ship, including his incredibly talented son Stephen McGregor, immediately welcomed me into the Big Ship family. I recorded my first song there, "Put Jah First," which is now a big hit.

Up at Big Ship I was introduced to the traditional Jamaican steamed fish and bammy prepared by Freddie's personal chef. Mmmmm, was it good! I immediately fell in love with Jamaica – the reggae music bumpin' on every street corner, the food, the people, the "window washers," Devon House ice cream – everything about it!

To this day, I have recorded 27 songs in Jamaica and counting... Jamaica is everything I had hoped it would be and so much more! So similar to Hawaii in so many ways – sunshine, beautiful beaches, good vibes, reggae music – yet so unique and different at the same time. It is now my home away from home.

Earl Morgan of the Heptones recalls his first meeting with another legend.

I remember back in 1976 when "Book of Rules" was doing well on the charts in England. We got a call from someone saying that Chris Blackwell wanted to meet us. Island Records was going to make an offer for the Heptones to record some albums. They also wanted us to go on a European tour with Toots and the Maytals and the Wailers. We were excited.

So Leroy, Barry and I got ready by dressing in our best clothes and we made our way down to the Sheraton Hotel in New Kingston. We were looking forward to meeting this man that we had heard so much about. We sat in the lobby and waited.

We knew that Chris Blackwell owned a multi-million dollar company. We knew he was an important man in the reggae music business. We were expecting to see a man in fine clothes;



Earl Morgan

we thought he would be wearing shiny dress shoes, a designer suit and a nice felt hat.

We waited for what seemed like a very long time. After a while, this simple looking man wearing an old t-shirt, faded denim jeans and flip-flops approached us. He'd been sitting there looking around for quite awhile.

He said: "Do you know the Heptones?" "We are the Heptones!" "I am Chris Blackwell. Nice to meet you."

We were shocked to find out that this ordinary looking man was the Big Man we were waiting to meet. Now that I think about it, it's probably because Chris had Jamaican parentage and because he'd spent so much time with Bob Marley – that's why he was so humble.

After that meeting we put out *Night Food and Party Time* on the Island/Mango label.

Reggae's most sought-after guitarist, Earl "Chinna" Smith, takes us to Cameroon, Africa.

I went with Jimmy Cliff to perform in Yaoundé in Cameroon in 1989. It was raining like... forever and the people were there all night until 1 a.m. when the rain stopped. There were almost 40-odd thousand people chanting, "Jimmy, Jimmy."

Flash, our stage manager, fired himself that night – because of the high 220 voltage and the rain falling, he did not want to start the show. Newton Merritt insisted that we do the show. Some guy came on stage as a musician and he borrowed Doogie's (a.k.a. Radcliff Bryan) guitar. He played the Cameroon national anthem with his dreadlocks, forming the sound on the guitar with them!

The response the crowd gave, it was like crazy. We wanted to give them the concert despite the rain but we also wanted them to be safe. That performance was a privilege that I will never forget.

Raining reggae from artist Zema!

What a blessing it was for me to get the honor of touring Brazil with the legendary Gladiators and experience the great passion of Brazilian reggae fans! The first night, 2 a.m., about halfway through the Gladiators' performance, it started pouring rain. I thought, "Oh no, I hope the people don't have to leave!" Much to my surprise only a few people in the back left for cover. And I mean it was really a downpour. Almost the whole crowd stayed for the entire show, dancing exuberantly in the mud and heavy rain and singing along with the songs so loud they almost drowned out the band. This went on for quite awhile and their spirits were never dampened! Wow, I was really impressed that the Brazilian reggae fans are so devoted!

One Love

The prevailing theme to these memories is the passion people share for reggae music around the globe, across all circumstances and its power to bring people together. We look forward to hearing from you and your "Reggaelection" for next year. Email Justine at justine@reggaefestivalguide.com **Bless** ✨