

# REVITALIZED!

## Reggae Ambassadors Worldwide

by Kyle Russell,  
RAW Executive Director

Reggae Ambassadors Worldwide (RAW) is in its 15th year of existence. Many reggae enthusiasts haven't heard of it. Some who have, either love it or hate it. Some are indifferent. Others feel it's irrelevant. What can a non-profit with fewer than 1,000 members do that hasn't been done before – or that could favorably impact the industry – or the world – for that matter?

That answer is limited only by your imagination and your capacity to put your shoulder to the wheel and make a difference. As Anthony B said, "Nobody want to plant the corn, everybody want raid the barn." Possibly too often we want something for nothing. "Can I get on the guest list?" How often have you heard – or even said – that?

Sometimes it's easier to be shepherded around, to "follow fashion," avoiding the effort it takes to create or build something. Industry and originality are central to the evolution of reggae. Musically, do we reminisce, imitate or aspire to the roots – do we get caught up in the hype of the dancehall – or do we think and act for ourselves?

These are questions each and every member of the reggae scene needs to mull over, and is just what RAW's founders, Papa Pilgrim and Rastaman Nané, did back in the early '90s. They acted on their frustration at "meager attendance at reggae concerts and hit-or-miss service by reggae labels" and took heed of a seed planted years ago by Inner Circle's guitarist, Roger Lewis. Lewis, recognizing that there were committed reggae enthusiasts all over the world, suggested that these enthusiasts "link up to form a massive reggae network to serve the best interests of the singers and players, as well as the reggae industry as a whole."

RAW members hail from 50 countries and what sets RAW apart is that unlike virtually every other entity in the business, it is not simply looking out for its own narrow self interest in promoting only this artist or that, this show or that, this label, country, understanding of The Message, or that – RAW encompasses the whole of these and more.



RAW has been putting out newsletters relating the news and progress of its members – first via *The Ambassador* circular and now via the semi-weekly email *Wha Gwaan*. RAW's even joined the social networking age on MySpace.

What really jazzes new members, and has become a major building block for many fans that later become reggae professionals, is the extraordinary database and networking resources available to members. Names, numbers and emails of a multitude of common-minded folk at all levels of the business – listeners, musicians, radio DJs, labels, producers – are all represented.

Says RAW member, Anna Fisher (#1244), "It was through this list that I was able to single-handedly get my music played on hundreds of radio stations internationally within a couple weeks!" Ambassador David (RAW #5) notes that getting even one gig through the network or availing yourself to the many

intra-RAW discounts on goods and services provides tangible rewards for enrolling.

Several conferences were held in the early years, the last one in 2003 (the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary). Since then, efforts have gone mainly into building the organization's infrastructure. Bylaws were developed and just this spring, we instated an enlarged Board of Directors (many of them "new blood") who were selected through an exhaustive nine-month nomination and election process to serve the goals of the movement.

All is not bureaucracy and red tape though. Our collective agenda for the coming year is to be ever more inclusive – hearing and acting on members' suggestions – and welcoming new (and previous) members with a passion for spreading the positive vibe of reggae music. How we can literally bring this to fruition is all important. Specifically, RAW's talking about developing street teams and regional chapters to galvanize interest and support for traveling artists. One of the most exciting initiatives on the table comes from Ras Danny Fallon (RAW #301, DJ and Labels Director), who wants to see the creation of a central data-transfer system for uploading, archiving and accessing RAW-produced music.

On a larger level, there are promising collaborations that could be pursued with cause-based non-profits such as Amnesty International and the American Civil Liberties Union. RAW is uniquely positioned to provide a constructive voice in the dialog of "what is reggae?"

To find out more, feel free to email [ReggaePR@aol.com](mailto:ReggaePR@aol.com) or call our new PR & Media Coordinator Frances Nwajei at (617) 216-4494. Visit the main site at [www.ReggaeAmbassadors.org](http://www.ReggaeAmbassadors.org) or [www.MySpace.com/RAWreggae](http://www.MySpace.com/RAWreggae). ☺

*Kyle Russell began his service to reggae 20 years ago as a bass player. In the '90s, he founded Rhythm Music Magazine, the still-running Bill's Bar Sundays and the Dub Station band. Russell has managed, backed and/or produced hundreds of artists, booking cross-country runs and using his high-profile [www.Reggae4i.com](http://www.Reggae4i.com) and electronic newsletter service to network thousands in the industry.*