



READINGS FOR REASONINGS

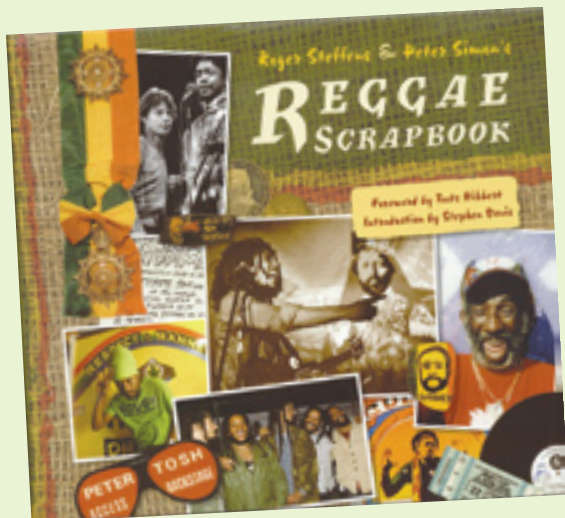
**BOOK & DVD
REVIEWS**
by Chuck Foster

Roger Steffens' and Peter Simon's Reggae Scrapbook

Insight Editions (2007)

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Roger Steffens' and Peter Simon's *Reggae Scrapbook* is an interactive compendium of two lives greatly impacted by reggae music and the culture it spawned and spread. Filled with folding flaps, pockets and pouches full of fliers, ticket stubs, hand-written set lists and 45 and LP graphics lovingly reproduced and pleasingly presented, this is a book that is literally chock-full of surprises. Best of all, Simon's legendary photos of the music's founding fathers and Roger's descriptive tales of major moments in its history make this a fan's delight, providing hours of edifying entertainment and sharing the life's work of two of reggae's best-known documenters.



Reggae Scrapbook is filled with insightful vignettes on various individual artists like Delroy Wilson, Lee Perry, Marcia Griffiths, Joe Higgs, Jimmy Cliff, Jacob Miller and dozens of others,

including groups such as Steel Pulse and Morgan Heritage – and of course Bob Marley and the Wailers – enhanced by Simon's classic (plus many new) photos and photographic reproductions of miscellaneous ephemera gathered over the years – buttons, badges, backstage passes, posters and various other objects d'reggae. Some are printed separately, tucked into envelopes and under flaps you can open, unravel and enjoy on their own. Postcards, stickers, reproductions of hundreds of album covers (many inscribed to Roger by the artists and musicians) and 7" singles – it's as if you've been set free to graze through a reggae collector's dream at your leisure.

An hour-long DVD included with the book showcases footage from *L.A. Reggae*, the city's earliest cable reggae show. These interviews, including Roger Steffens' sit-downs with Luciano, Alton Ellis and The Heptones and some amazing straight talk from Peter Tosh, add another dimension. Portions of the conversations with Joseph Hill and Judy Mowatt are also reprinted in the text. Brightly colored as a reggae festival, filled with gorgeous photographs from Peter Simon, Roy Sweetland and Adrian Boot, a nice update to the dancehall era from co-conspirator Molli "Fire" Fagan and tales of reggae epiphanies galore, this is a unique treasure among the reggae canon, a window on Jamaican music's impact on the world from the point of view of people who have had the opportunity to get to know some of the music makers in their prime, as the music itself spread across the globe. A celebration of reggae music from its earliest manifestations to its

latest incarnations, this tome is as much a treat to the eyes as the music itself is to the ear. www.insighteditions.com

Overstanding Rastafari "Jamaica's Gift to the World"

by Yasus Afari
Senya-Cum (2007)

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Dub poet Yasus Afari, who first came on the scene with the educational and uplifting single "Teachings of Marcus" has had a varied and unique career that includes the albums *Dancehall Baptism*, *Honour Crown Him* and *Mental Assassin* (produced by Tappa Zukie) as well as a European tour with Black Uhuru. His latest release, *Revolution Chapter One* is as insightful as his early work and features one song ("Jump Fi Shiloh") with guest vocalists Everton Blender, Sugar Black, Andrew Priest, Utan Green and Kulcha Knox. He is now the author of a new

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book, *Overstanding Rastafari: "Jamaica's Gift to the World"* that sheds light on the movement that serves as the original inspiration for reggae.

Though there have been many books written about Rastafari, even the best of them – including Joseph Owen's *Dread: The Rastafarians of Jamaica* (1976), Frank Jan van Dijk's *JAHmaica: Rastafari and Jamaican Society 1930-1990* (1993) and Helene Lee's *The First Rasta: Leonard Howell and the Rise of Rastafarianism* (1999) – were not written by Rastafarians. Thus Yasus Afari's new work is a welcome addition to the growing library of texts that try to deal in a serious manner with a new way of looking at things that have swept the world, and which many have come to understand only through the lyrics of reggae songs. One interesting facet of his perspective is the very positive view of women in Rastafari, in opposition to characterizations in some early non-Rasta books on the movement (not the three I have mentioned). This view is more in keeping with my personal observations of the importance of women in Rastafari. Also of great interest is the chapter on the visit of Haile Selassie I to Jamaica including the full text of his speech to the Jamaican Parliament.

Although the book is laid out in a scholarly manner, Yasus Afari is a passionate advocate of his subject and disdains the Western scientific detachment which is often used as a justification for society's misdeeds. He immerses his reader in African roots and culture and the Caribbean perspective. In separate chapters he elucidates upon historical origins, early pioneers, values and ethics, worship and rituals, symbols, festivals, language, major concepts and the relation of Rastafari to Christianity, repatriation, global vision and politics. Though he gets a little technical at times, as when he explains the hydro-pneumatic circuitry of the chalice – dude, I just light one end and suck on the other – Afari articulates the purpose behind many practices that might otherwise be taken for granted and

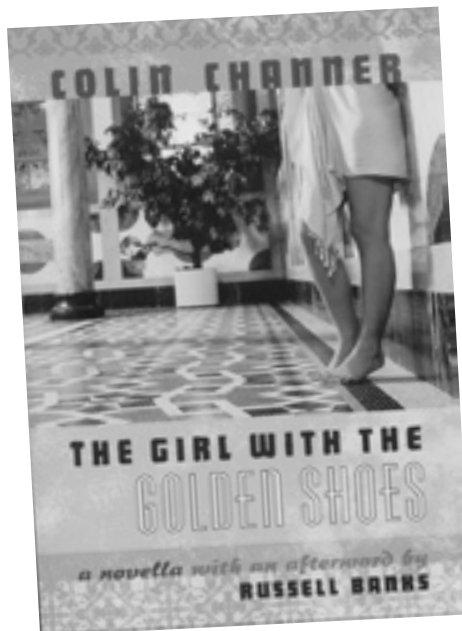
provides an excellent resource for questions about Nyahbingi, Bobo Shanti, Twelve Tribes of Israel, dreadlocks and religious principles of Rastafari. Along the way he deals with gender relationships, food and nutrition and the divinity of Haile Selassie I.

This is a serious work, and one I think you may find yourself returning to again and again to reference some aspect of the movement or for inspiration and edification. One of the great beauties of the Rastafari movement is the room left for individual interpretation and this is one reason no single codification of its essence can speak for all. Yasus Afari takes an enlightened perspective and shares his personal vision fearlessly so that others may come to their own understanding. Although this book is clearly a labor of love, it's just as obvious that it took an enormous amount of work and thought to bring it to this manifestation. He has navigated treacherous waters many among the faithful would be reluctant to assay, and is to be congratulated for bringing this ship to shore. www.yasusafari.com

The Girl with the Golden Shoes

by Colin Channer
Akashic Books (2007)

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Iron Balloons: Hit Fiction from Jamaica's Calabash Writer's Workshop

edited by Colin Channer
Akashic Books (2006)

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Two recent novels and a collection of short stories touch on reggae in interesting ways. Jamaican-born Colin Channer (author of *Waiting in Vain*, *Satisfy My Soul* and *Passing Through*) is the editor of *Iron Balloons: Hit Fiction from Jamaica's Calabash Writer's Workshop* which contains stories of interest like Kwame Dawe's "Marley's Ghost," "I Want to Disturb My Neighbor" by Geoffrey Philip, Marlon James' "The Last Jamaican Lion" and other works which emerged from the Calabash Writer's Workshop in Jamaica. The impetus for the group was to try and produce literature with the passion and commitment with which others produce reggae. As one who loves both great literature and reggae, I find this an admiral goal and deem the result well worth the effort.

Channer's novella, *The Girl with the Golden Shoes*, is a coming-of-age story of a young girl whose life has been changed by a random encounter and whose growing awareness, fed by books, causes her to leave the fishing village she grew up in (on the mythical island of San Carlos) to try and find her own place in the world. Before she reaches her destination, a series of events shade and illuminate her transformation. Even though the story is set in the early '40s, the tale of human longing for a better

life is universal and directly relevant today. Sketching social interaction and combining interior monologue with deft patois dialogue, Channer presents a vibrant slice of life with the simplicity of Italo Svevo in *Emilio's Carnival* (2001).

She's Gone

by Kwame Dawes
Akashic Books (2007)

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Kwame Dawes' *She's Gone* is the story of a guitarist in a reggae band who brings his American sweetheart home to Jamaica, complicating both their lives. It's a story about the human condition, the nature of relationships, the difficulties in overcoming real-life struggles while trying to adjust to shifting social mores and the serious consequences of our everyday actions, told from the point of view of more than one participant. Dawes has an ear and an eye for detail and his descriptions of places and people and observations on life in Jamaica, New York, South Carolina and Canada speak to the ways of us all and address some of the complexities of life. Especially rich is his ability to capture small touches of Jamaica – the flavor of a dip-and-fall-back stew, the effect of bright sunlight on a funeral party dressed in white, a muddy path in the Blue Mountains.

As with the practitioners of reggae today and the artists who first established it,



the bar was set high for Caribbean fiction by the Jamaican Claude McKay in classic works *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*; John Hearn in *The Eye of the Storm*, among others. It's nice to see contemporary writers Channer and Dawes come up to the mark. All three works are high in literary content and worth a thoughtful read. www.akashicbooks.com

Africa Unite: A Celebration of Bob Marley's Vision

directed by Stephanie Black
Palm Pictures (2007)

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Africa Unite: A Celebration of Bob Marley's Vision will hold a special place in the reggae lover's heart. Though born in Jamaica, Marley pointed people all over the world toward Africa. This documentary weaves together many strands surrounding a week-long celebration of Marley's 60th birthday (February 6) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 2005. It includes highlights from

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a 12-hour concert attended by over 350,000 people featuring Bob's sons Ziggy, Stephen, Damian, Julian and Kymani, as well as Angelique Kidjo, Bob Andy and others. The film contains many clips of Selassie I (including some shot by Miriam Cooper in the '30s) throughout, plus archival footage placing Africa's struggle to maintain independence, self-reliance and unity in context. Produced and directed by Stephanie Black who also gave us the Jamaican documentary *Life & Debt* (2001), this film brims over with colorful images: Haile Selassie's granddaughter, Bob Marley's mother and coverage of many who came together from around the world for the Africa Unite celebration and symposiums. Included are impassioned statements from (among others) Lauren Hill and symposium chairman Danny Glover, who may have summed it up best saying, "Africa Unite means listening to the young people and allowing them to lead the way."

Africa Unite covers the journey of 71-year-old Bongo Tawny who makes the pilgrimage from JA to Ethiopia for the celebrations. We see Bongo (the first to greet His Majesty's plane when it landed in Jamaica 4/21/66) worshipping at the foot of Selassie's throne within His Majesty's Trinity Cathedral in Addis Ababa – a moving inspirational experience for him, and for those of us viewing. Another scene cuts from the League of Nation's speech of Haile Selassie I to Bob Marley performing

"War," which takes its lyrics directly from the Emperor's speech. Along the way we also get a stirring performance of "He's a Legend" from Marcia Griffiths and Rita Marley, as well as the visions of Bob's children united on stage solidly carrying his message into the 21st century.

Much of the symposium footage was taken within the building that once housed the Organization of African Unity (founded by Selassie) whose halls Selassie I inaugurated on the day (in 1961) corresponding to Bob Marley's birthday. Themes of decolonization, solidarity and self-empowerment are explored in depth and are central topics of the Africa Unite symposium. DVD bonus features include a reasoning session with the Marley brothers (including the rarely-heard-from Robbie), an interview with Rita Marley about the Marley Foundation's work in Africa, an acoustic twelve-string performance by Bob of "Redemption Song" in 1980, still photos and a sampling of the 2006 Africa Unite show in Ghana.

The inspiration of people intent upon carrying forward Marley's vision is illuminated throughout the film, and the living possibilities of *Africa Unite* are projected into the future. This is the ultimate goal of the work of Haile Selassie, Marcus Garvey, Bob Marley and of Rastafari throughout the world. With today's divisions in Africa and the world at large, the unifying message of *Africa Unite* couldn't have come at a better time. www.palmpictures.com or www.africa-unite.org

Deep Roots Music

directed by Howard Johnson
MVD (2007)

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The six-part TV series which ran in the UK in the early '80s but never before in the U.S., is now out on three, two-part DVDs each running around 100 minutes. *Deep Roots Music* is packed with amazing footage – kind of a Ken Burns' *Jazz* of reggae. Filmographer Howard Johnson blends historical clips (like archival footage of Don Drummond and Prince Buster) with his own documentary segments (including marvelous sections



with Sir Lord Comic and Count Machuki, in Pt. 2, "Ranking Sounds") dealing in separate episodes with: Dennis Brown, Bunny Lee, Lee "Scratch" Perry (the series takes its title from a free-form spontaneous rap he delivers to the camera), other artists, producers, elements and aspects of the music. We are treated to some truly incredible experiences, including watching Delroy Wilson, Johnny Clarke, Jackie Edwards and others recording vocals in King Tubby's intimate Drummillie Avenue studio with Prince Jammy on the board. The late Mikey Dread is your tour guide for this fascinating view of the world of roots reggae, with side trips through dub, mento, Nyahbingi, ska and rock steady. The Mighty Diamonds at Channel One, Charlie Ace and his Swing-A-Ling truck, Bob Marley and the Wailers performing live in New York ('77) and at the One Love Peace Concert ('78), Jimmy Riley, Jack Ruby, U-Roy, Marcia Griffiths with Sonia Pottinger, Toots and the Maytals – it's a glimpse into Jamaican culture and reggae you can't get from just the records. Great stuff! Especially for those of us who didn't get to see it the first time around. www.mvdvisual.com ☺

Chuck Foster writes the "Reggae Update" column for *The Beat* magazine and hosts Reggae Central on KPFF-LA Sunday afternoons from 3-5 p.m., which can be accessed anytime during the week by visiting KPFF.org, choosing Audio Archives from the column on the left on the main page, scrolling down to Reggae Central and punching play. He is the author of *Roots Rock Reggae: An Oral History of Reggae Music from Ska to Dancehall* published in 1999 by *Billboard Books*.

