

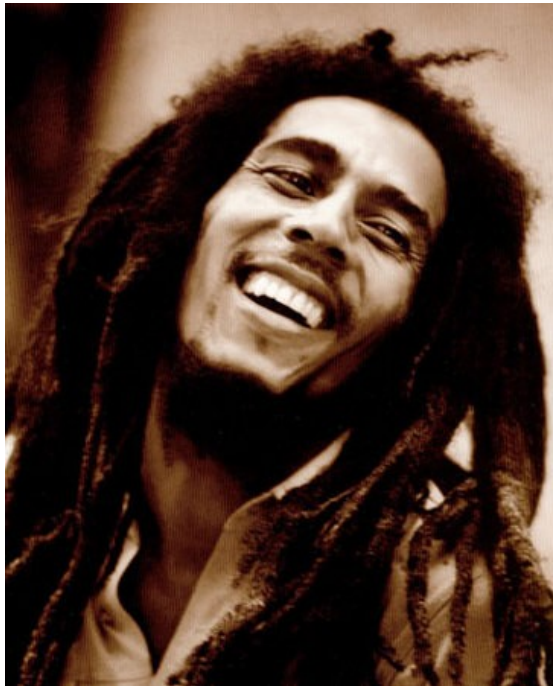
Michael Waddacor presents

# ★ Strange Brew™

Celebrating seminal rock music | **Edition 12** | Monday October 1 2007

A portrait of Bob Marley (1945-1981)

## Reggae's poet laureate sang for the downtrodden



**Bob Marley** ... hip, happy, cool, gifted and the undisputed Poet Laureate of Reggae.

### Inside this Exodus edition (part 2)

- 01 Reggae's poet laureate sang for the downtrodden: A portrait of Bob Marley (1945-1981)
- 07 The Bob Marley and the Wailers album discography
- 07 The *Songs of Freedom* box set (1992)
- 08 Let's get together and feel alright (*Exodus* revisited): Comprehensive, 5,800-word appraisal for serious fans
- 16 *Exodus* released on USB memory stick

### Inside Strange Brew 11 (2007-09-30)

- 01 So much trouble in Jamaica: The prelude to *Exodus*
- 03 Exile in Babylon: The making of *Exodus*
- 06 The sweet sounds of protest: The short *Exodus* review
- 09 A celebration of defining music: The *Exodus* book
- 10 Classic reggae albums (for the neophyte)
- 11 Natty dread it in-a Zimbabwe: The 1980 concert
- 12 Digging deeper: A list of books on Bob Marley
- 13 Summer of punk: A list of key albums from 1977
- 13 Removing the vex from vexillology: The Rastafari flag
- 14 Beloved Jah: A postcard Haile Selassie cameo

Brought up in squalid conditions in Trenchtown, Kingston, as Jamaica underwent the death throes of British colonial rule, Robert Nesta Marley gradually transformed himself – with the help of his fellow musicians, producers, promoters and the international media – from a fringe “rude boy” singing crude and lively ska music for a comparatively small following of West Indian fans into an iconic, rock-star-type purveyor of thought-provoking reggae fuelled by his burning desire, as a generational spokesperson and a poet of the oppressed, to see our world emancipated from all forms of slavery, injustice and oppression.

While little of Marley's political and spiritual dream may have materialised during his tragically foreshortened life, one cannot help sensing in the early years of the new millennium that the Poet Laureate of Reggae may not have lived his life entirely in vain as a poet and prophet. Our world has changed in many respects since Marley's death in 1981 – and one cannot help knowing and foreseeing that far bigger political, social, economic and cultural changes will occur over the next 25 years. In many respects, he was a visionary ahead of his time: a spiritual prophet, a revolutionary messenger and an African Renaissance poet.

During his comparatively short reign as the world's premium international reggae performer between the early 1970s and his death in May 1981, Bob “Tuff Gong” Marley was the undisputed and seemingly invincible Poet Laureate of Reggae. Adored and respected in his native Jamaica as an influential musician and as a national hero, he would rise during the 1970s to become a global icon and one of the leaders in promoting the music of Jamaica and the Third World among a wider global audience.

For millions of devoted fans around the world, he was the one credible – and spellbindingly enjoyable – poet, songwriter and singer who protested vehemently and usually eloquently about the Babylon System and the plight of the oppressed, most notably Africans and people of African descent, such

as the vast majority of his fellow Jamaicans – not to forget other West Indians and the African-Americans.

### **A man of many facets**

This short, compassionate, reflective, passionate, generous, astute, candid, outspoken and gifted man was at once a devout Rastafari (a member of the Twelve Tribes sect), a passionate and creative musician, a dedicated and loving family man, a generous and hospitable friend, an African Renaissance poet and visionary, a committed political activist and revolutionary, a football and fitness fanatic and, some say, also a sex symbol, a lascivious lover and a serial philanderer.

Most of all, though, we remember Bob Marley affectionately as a tremendously gifted songwriter, an arousing singer with distinctive phrasings and intonations, a dynamic, heart-and-soul live performer and as a sympathetic activist who called persistently, vigorously and convincingly for the emancipation of the enslaved, the downtrodden and the disenfranchised.

In the world of popular culture, his distinctive face, framed by his trademark dreadlocks and lit with that enrapturing smile, became the image of Third World cool – an icon more instantly recognisable and adored around the world than the visages of Elvis Presley, The Beatles and Jimi Hendrix.

Marley's popularity and iconic status is not confined merely to the goodness of his music, but, perhaps more significantly, to the goodness of his heart and the nobility of his mind as a voice for the lowly and oppressed. [Key aspects of his lyrics are explored on pages 11 to 14 as part of the comprehensive *Exodus* album appraisal].

### **Leading by example**

Various insider accounts of Marley paint him as something of a perfectionist and disciplinarian when it came to rehearsing as a group for tours and recording sessions.

While being hip, cool and highly responsive to music, Marley was not an archetypal party animal and was always insistent that band members maintained a fitness regime, participated in recreational band football and adhered to a strict I-tal Rastafari diet, which also required abstinence from alcohol.

He demanded complete dedication from his fellow musicians and was quick to admonish them for playing sloppy licks and missing their cues. His demands – sometimes excessive – were extended to Marcia Griffiths, Rita Marley and Judy Mowatt as the members of the I-Threes vocal group.

Marley, it seems, was adamant that he would lead by example. On tours, he tended to be the first of the Wailers to gather in a hotel lobby and the first to get inside the tour bus. In an interview published in the March 2005 edition of *Mojo* magazine to

commemorate Marley's sixtieth birthday, Judy Mowatt said:

"He was a great leader because he didn't ask anybody to do something he wouldn't."

Like other uniquely gifted and styled musicians before him, who died far too young, like Jimi Hendrix, one doubts if the world will again hear the exceptional likes of Bob Marley.

More than 26 years since his death, Marley's heartfelt music and messages endure as an untarnished legacy, reaching out to embrace new generations of young music enthusiasts who have scores of the Wailers' classics downloaded into their iPods.



*An airbrushed portrait of Marley performing live by artist Steve Brogdon (1992).*

### **Air of dignity and compassion**

What is so touching about Marley's legacy is the sheer sweetness, sincerity and tenderness of his music, even when he delved deeper into his agitated political mind and expressed his outrage at the notion of modern-day slavery.

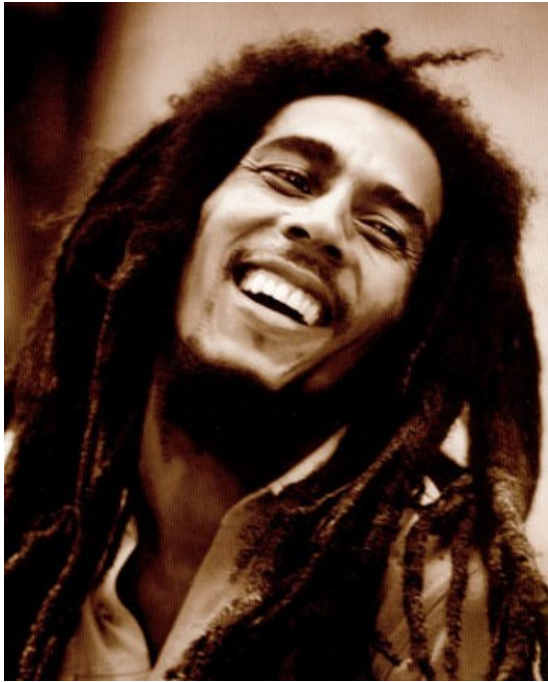
I believe that this is the one overriding quality about Marley's approach to music and life that endeared him to so many millions of people and brought credibility to, and acceptance of, his messages – even when his commentaries and accusations were patently barbed or acerbic.

His protestations were heartfelt and, in the best of his protest songs, such as those found in the first half of the *Exodus* album, he could maintain an assured air of dignity, compassion and hope.

His musical influence as Jamaica's most talented reggae songwriter (and visionary spokesperson) travelled far and wide, not only inspiring the music of his compatriots like Peter Tosh, Bunny Wailer, Burning Spear, and Toots and the Maytalls, but also a broad cross-section of rock, punk, two-tone, blues and soul musicians, including Eric Clapton, Stevie Wonder, The Police, The Clash, 10CC, Led Zeppelin, John Martyn, Marianne Faithfull, The Rolling Stones, Paul Simon, The Specials, Elvis Costello and Manfred Mann Earth Band, to name just a few artists.

Worldwide, Bob Marley and the Wailers have sold more than 30-million albums. Their outstanding 1984 compilation album, *Legend*, alone, has sold more than 12-million copies and remains the world's biggest-selling reggae album. This 14-track compilation is the ideal single-CD introduction to some of the group's best songs.

### Bob Marley: Universal icon



*Hip, cool, adorable, sussed, charismatic, outspoken ... and so much more. Worldwide, Bob Marley's image has become more iconic and revered than any other famous musician, including Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Elvis Presley, Bob Dylan, The Beatles, Michael Jackson and Madonna. His face is instantly recognisable on every continent as a universal symbol of musical pleasure, political outspokenness and spiritual advocacy. His alluring image and music appeal to a diverse cross-section of people, regardless of race, language, gender, faith, political persuasion, occupation and economic class.*

*Rare among any artists of the twentieth century, Marley has become a symbol of the universal man – an artist for all seasons, a hero of the common folk, a statesman for the disenfranchised and a fervent campaigner for political, social and economic reform and justice. His greatest legacy, however, are those simple, heartfelt and majestic songs he wrote ... songs shaped by so many moods, emotions and ideas, but mostly those songs about love, peace, compassion, redemption, justice, freedom and the restoration of spiritual and moral values in a world that had become too divided, greedy and unjust.*

### Growing up tough

The Poet Laureate of Reggae was born Robert Nesta Marley on February 6 1945 (an Aquarian) in the small village of Nine Mile in St Ann's Parish on the northern shores of Jamaica. There is, however, some continuing conjecture about his real birth date because his Jamaican passport declared his date of birth as April 6 1945. From a young age, Marley endured varying degrees of mockery, derision and social ostracism because of his mixed ethnicity and slight physical stature.

His white Jamaican father, Norval Sinclair Marley – who was much older than his mother – was born in 1895 and was of English origin, with his parents hailing from Sussex. Norval Marley – a man of comparatively affluent means by Jamaican standards – worked as a marine officer and captain and as a sugar-plantation overseer. He married an 18-year-old Jamaican of African origin, Cedella Booker (the date eluded me during my research). Sadly, for the young Marley, his father spent long periods away from home on business before having a fatal heart attack at the age of 60 in 1955.

Not long after his father's death, Marley and mother Cedella settled in the famous Trenchtown slum of Kingston, an area that would later be alluded to in some of his songs. Here, the young Marley learnt to grow up hard and strong, which earned him the nickname of Tuff Gong, which later became the name of the Wailers' record company in Jamaica. Besides having to contend with his mixed ethnicity in a tough, all-black neighbourhood, Marley was also thin and short. During his late adolescence, his height peaked at 5' 4" (1.63 metres).

### Dabbling with ska

Like many great musicians before him, Marley was not an assiduous pupil and took little interest in academic subjects. Nevertheless, he loved music, football and hanging out and became friends with a young Neville Livingston, who later would become Bunny Wailer. The two began to explore their interests in the prevailing pop music being played in Kingston during the late 1950s.

At the age of 14, he left school to become an apprentice welder in Kingston. In their spare time, Wailer and Marley made music with a local singer and Rasta (an upholder of the Rastafari faith), Joe Higgs, whom Marley later cited as an important mentor.

Through these sessions, Marley met Winston McIntosh, who later would become the more outspoken and militant Peter Tosh. During these days, he also worked alongside another welder, Desmond Dacres, who later would become the Desmond Dekker who – with The Aces – had

international hits in the 1960s and 1970s with songs such as *Israelites* (1969) and *You Can Really Get It If You Want* (1970).

In 1962, at the age of 17, Marley recorded his first two singles with a Kingstonian producer, Leslie Kong, who also wrote the aforementioned *Israelites* hit. Released under the pseudonym of Bobby Martell on the small Beverley label, the songs, the ska-rich *Judge Not* and *One Cup of Coffee*, did not make much impact on local audiences, but they would later appear on the definitive, 78-song, career-spanning *Songs of Freedom* box set released in 1992. Disappointment, however, did not dampen Marley's musical ambitions.

A year later, he, Bunny Wailer and Peter Tosh formed a ska-cum-rocksteady group, The Teenagers, with fellow Kingstonians, Junior Braithwaite, Beverley Kelso and Cherry Smith. In time, their name would metamorphosise to The Wailing Rudeboys, then The Wailing Wailers and, finally, The Wailers. In 1964, The Wailers' first single, *Simmer Down* – produced by Coxson Dodd at Studio One and focused on a message telling Jamaica's "rude boys" to calm down – topped the Jamaican music charts and became one of the country's biggest hits of 1964, having sold a phenomenal 80,000 copies.

The distinctive sound of Bob Marley's voice would become a regular feature of the Jamaican airwaves, as The Wailers released other popular singles, including *Love and Affection*, *I'm Still Waiting*, *One Love* and *Put It On*, all of which were recorded at Kingston's now legendary Studio One.

### **Marriage and first US sojourn**

In 1965, The Wailers were honed to the trio of Marley, Tosh and Wailer following the departure of Braithwaite, Kelso and Smith. By now, Marley had become the principal songwriter and singer, but the lack of income, partly due to royalty rip-offs, forced the group to disband. On February 10 1966, Marley married Alpharita Constantia (Rita) Anderson, a young nurse who also had singing ambitions, before travelling to the United States the next day for the first of his two American work sojourns.

He lived with his mother for eight months in Wilmington, Delaware, where he held several low-paying, menial jobs, including working as a car-park attendant, dishwasher and laboratory assistant for Dupont. Not long after his return to Kingston, he adopted the Rastafari faith and began to grow his dreadlocks.

The Wailers reformed some time between late 1966 and early 1967, and tried their luck again, but, after a dispute with producer Coxson Dodd of Studio One fame, the group abandoned recording for a while. Some time in 1968, Marley and Wailer were arrested for being in possession of marijuana. Marley served a month in prison, while Wailer had to endure a year.

Also, some time in 1969, Marley returned to Delaware in the US for another short work stint, this time working for the Chrysler car assembly plant at Newark.

In 1969, after their Studio One disappointments, the Wailers opted to collaborate with Lee "Scratch" Perry and his studio band, The Upsetters. Their partnership lasted for about three years and they recorded what many reggae enthusiasts regard as some of The Wailers' best works, such as the original *Trenchtown Rock*, *Sun Is Shining*, *Small Axe*, *Duppy Conqueror* and *Soul Rebel*. While a confrontation between Marley and Perry about the assigning of recording rights led to the end of their musical alliance, they would remain good friends and later work together.

Between 1968 and 1972, Bob and Rita Marley, Peter Tosh and Bunny Wailer spent time in the studios of Kingston and London rerecording some of their older songs for JAD Records. Their intention was to produce a more accessible, commercial sound. For a short while in 1970 and 1971, Marley also spent some time living in Sweden and in London.

The big international break came in 1972 when Britain's Jamaican-born record mogul, Chris Blackwell, signed them to his burgeoning label, Island Records. By now, the Wailers were expanded to include the Barrett brothers, bassist Aston and drummer Carlton, both of whom had been part of the Upsetters.

Between 1966 and 1972, the Island stable featured some of the best names in British rock and folk music, including Blodwyn Pig, Spencer Davis Group, Sandy Denny, Nick Drake, Fairport Convention, Free, Incredible String Band, Jade Warrior, Jethro Tull, King Crimson, John Martyn, Mott the Hoople, Quintessence, Spooky Tooth and Traffic.

By now, Blackwell was diversifying his stable of artists and using the emerging sounds of reggae and ska as an important springboard, a smart move that would turn Island into the most successful international producer of reggae in the 1970s, thanks largely to immense success of Marley and the Wailers.

The Wailers had already formed their own independent record company in 1971, Tuff Gong, and used this company to continue distributing their records in Jamaica.

The Island deal, however, would give the band access to a growing world market and, most important, the kind of income they needed to allow them the freedom they wanted to pursue their musical dreams, without distractive, part-time menial jobs, and bring their music to a wider global audience through the world's expanding rock-concert circuit.

After years of recording singles, Bob Marley and the Wailers released their first two albums independently in Jamaica, *Soul Rebel* (December 1970) and *African Herbsman* (1972), neither of which received

widespread popular or critical acclaim globally. Blackwell, however, advanced Marley and the Wailers the money they needed (one source states £8,000 and another £4,000) to record their third album in Jamaica.

### **Breakthrough courtesy of Clapton**

The Wailers' first album for Island Records, *Catch a Fire*, was released worldwide in April 1973. Featuring guest artists Wayne Perkins and John "Rabbit" Bundrick (of late-Free *Heartbreaker* fame), the album went on to sell well and earn the group critical favour in the international music media despite not yielding a major hit single.

This album featured a few of Bob Marley's earlier gems, among them the masterful anthem, *Stir It Up*. The second Island album, a tougher and rootsier *Burnin'*, followed in October-November 1973 and included *Get Up*, *Stand Up* and *I Shot the Sheriff*.

Eric Clapton covered the latter song on his career-defining *461 Ocean Boulevard* album (released in August 1974), which became a number-one hit single in the USA, and, in the process, brought Marley's budding talent and reputation – from a global perspective – to a considerably larger international audience. The Wailers commenced a US tour as a support act for Sly Stone – formerly of Sly and the Family Stone fame – but the raunchy Jamaicans, according to legend, were asked to quit the tour because they were outperforming Sly and his band.

In December 1973, not long after the release of *Burnin'*, the original honed version of the Wailers disbanded – and Peter Tosh and Bunny Wailer went on to pursue successful solo careers. Both artists released critically acclaimed debut solo albums in 1976, *Legalize It* by Tosh and *Blackheart Man* by Wailer, both of which are indispensable if you want to build a small collection of definitive reggae albums.

Their departure, the reasons for which remain clouded in conjecture, benefited the burgeoning Jamaican reggae scene by helping to bring new expressions and exponents of reggae to the world market. By the mid-1970s, reggae had become one of Jamaica's most significant exports.

Marley, in turn, went on to form a new version of the Wailers – one that would prove to be more musically proficient and better able to bring him an appealing global sound, while staying true to his reggae roots and Rastafari convictions.

The new Wailers continued to feature brothers Aston and Carlton Barrett, along with new recruits: Julian "Junior" Marvin and, later, Al Anderson on guitar, Tyrone Downie and, later, Earl Lindo on keyboards and Alvin "Seeco" Patterson on percussion. The I-Threes – Marcia Griffiths, Rita Marley and Judy Mowatt – continued to complement the band as the passionate backing singers.

On May 28 1974, the Wailers supported Marvin Gaye at the Carib Theatre in Jamaica. In September 1974,

after being made attractive offers from Motown and other record companies, Marley and the Wailers signed a new record deal with Island Records. As part of the deal, the ownership of the Jamaican homestead owned by Blackwell and Island Records, Island House, was transferred to Marley. This gracious home at 56 Hope Road in Kingston 6 would remain Marley's home for the rest of his life.

### **Receiving critical acclaim**

Thanks to Clapton's earnest and much-loved cover of *I Shot the Sheriff* and the popular appeal of *Burnin'*, the release in May 1975 of *Natty Dread* was embraced with even greater popular and critical enthusiasm. This album, perhaps more than any other, helped to consolidate Marley's position further as one of the most exciting social commentators and songwriters to have emerged in the 1970s.

With delightfully infectious songs like *Lively up Yourself*, *No Woman No Cry*, *Rebel Music* and *Natty Dread*, the 1975 studio album helped to entrench Marley and the Wailers as a great-albums band and as a dynamic stage act. It was the group's first album to enter the American Hot 100 album charts. *No Woman No Cry*, in turn, would also become the group's first major international hit single, albeit a live version culled from an excellent Lyceum concert recording in London.

During June and July 1975, Marley and the Wailers embarked on a US tour of smaller concert venues and earned themselves newfound critical acclaim, with the *New York Times* celebrating Marley as the "Black Prince of reggae". During this tour, the group recorded *Get Up*, *Stand Up* and *Kinky Reggae* for CBS Television's *Manhattan Transfer Show*, which was broadcast nationwide and brought both reggae music and the Wailers to new American audiences.

After the US, the Wailers flew to London where their concert at the Lyceum on The Strand was recorded and later mixed to become their first live album, *Live!*. On October 11 1975, Peter Tosh and Bunny Wailer agreed to rejoin the Wailers on stage for one final fling as part of Marley's support act for Stevie Wonder in Kingston.

The release of another excellent album, *Rastaman Vibration* (April 1976), helped to consolidate Marley's status and brought him an extended fan base with songs such as *Positive Vibration*, *Roots*, *Rock Reggae*, *Who the Cap Fit* and *War* – the song based on Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie's provocative speech on racial division to the United Nations in 1968.

This album spent four weeks in the *Billboard* Top 10 album charts in 1976, a commendable feat for any reggae artist. After making a dramatic entry in the mainstream American pop and rock market in 1976, Americans were "hooked" on reggae and Jan Wenner and the editors of *Rolling Stone* magazine selected Bob Marley and the Wailers as their Band the Year.



December 1976 was marked by that dreadful shooting incident, and then the Wailers' performance at the Smile Jamaica concert before the group fled to London – via The Bahamas – to live and work in exile for about a year, as documented in more detail in the first two articles of the previous edition (eleven).

In May 1977, not long after completing the *Exodus* and *Kaya* sessions, Marley injured his right big toe while playing a friendly football match with the Wailers against a team of French journalists. This injury led to doctors diagnosing a serious melanoma. Doctors later operated on his affected toe in July 1977 in an effort to stop the spread of cancer.

In the aftermath of *Exodus*, Marley and Wailers sustained their appeal and sales with the slightly weaker and disappointing, but nevertheless much-enjoyed follow-up album, *Kaya*, released in March 1978. Adhering to much of the lighter, sweeter sounds that had shaped *Exodus*, *Kaya* featured alluring songs like *Easy Skanking*, *Is This Love* and *Satisfy My Soul* and peaked at number four in the British charts – an advance on the number-eight slot achieved by *Exodus*.

In April 1978, not long after returning from their yearlong exile in Europe, Bob Marley and the Wailers performed at the One Love Peace Concert in Kingston, where – for a short while, at least – there was hope that the sparring political parties led by Michael Manley and Edward Seaga would bury their political hatchets and allow calm to prevail in the ghettos of Kingston. Towards the end of the concert, at Marley's request, the leaders of the opposing political parties, Manley and Seaga, joined Marley on stage and shook hands in a gesture of goodwill and peace.

Towards the end of 1978, the group released its double live album, *Babylon by Bus*. Also in 1978, Marley fulfilled a long-held dream when he made a short visit to Ethiopia (as well as Kenya). Sadly, though, the Ras Tafari – Emperor Haile Selassie – was dethroned in 1974 and died in 1975. That same year, the United Nations presented Marley with its Peace Medal of the Third World.

### **Upping his pan-African stance**

With the release in October 1979 of their compelling and highly militant *Survival* album – with that bold front cover adorned with the flags of liberated African states, it was patently obvious that Marley and the Wailers had intensified their pan-Africanist and black-emancipation political muscle and were determined to stir up deeper political dissent.

Perhaps more than any other Wailers album, Bob Marley drove his hard-edged messages home with arousing anthems such as *So Much Trouble in the World*, *Zimbabwe*, *Top Ranking*, *Babylon System*, *Africa Unite* and *Ambush in the Night*.

The power and urgency of the *Survival* songs would appeal to key members of the Zimbabwe African

Nationalist Union (ZANU) and the Patriotic Front (PF), which led to Bob Marley and the Wailers being invited to perform a free concert in Harare, Zimbabwe on April 18 1980 to celebrate the birth of majority rule in the former Rhodesia and the appointment of Robert Mugabe as the first prime minister (and later president) of a "free and democratic" Zimbabwe. This concert is revisited briefly in edition eleven.

June 1980, sadly, would mark the release of the last Bob Marley and the Wailers album while Marley was alive, the politically charged *Uprising*. The album's songs included *Redemption Song*, *Coming in from the Cold*, *Forever Loving Jah* and *Pimper's Paradise*. The album peaked at number five in the British charts. The European tour to promote the *Survival* and *Uprising* albums broke attendance records, with the Milan concert in Italy attracting 100,000 fans.

The death of Marley in May 1981 has its origins in 1977, when a doctor diagnosed a malignant melanoma – a tumour of melanin-forming cells – in his right big toe (hallux) while treating the aforementioned football wound. He was told he should have the toe amputated to prevent the melanoma from spreading. Marley refused, saying that the loss of his toe would not only curtail his love of dancing, but also render his body "unwhole", which would be against his Rastafari convictions.

The cancerous tumour metastasised and affected his liver, stomach, lungs and brain. In the latter half of 1980, after playing two shows at New York City's Madison Square Garden, the singer collapsed while jogging in Central Park. After mustering strength to perform his swansong concert at Pittsburgh on September 23 1980, the rest of the American *Uprising* tour was cancelled to enable Marley time to rest and, hopefully, recuperate.

Not long after closing the tour, on November 4 1980, Marley converted to the Christian Rastafari faith at the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Miami, where he was baptised and assumed a new religious name, Berhane Selassie. Five days later, the singer flew to Munich in Germany to consult with a controversial cancer specialist, Dr Josef Issels, in the Bavarian Alps. After being studied by Issels, it was agreed that Marley's cancer was far too advanced for any kind of known cure or treatment.

Months later, on a flight back home to Kingston from Germany, Marley became deeply ill and, on landing in Miami, Florida, he was rushed to the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital on the morning of May 11 1981. With his eldest son at his bedside, a then 12-year-old David "Ziggy" Marley, the frail singer uttered the words "Money can't buy life" before passing on. The official cause of his death was given as advanced cancer and a severe brain tumour.

Bob Marley was buried in a crypt near his birthplace at St Ann on the northern shores of Jamaican with his most beloved guitar, a Gibson Les Paul, along with a Bible, a soccer ball, a marijuana bud and that famous gold-and-onyx ring he wore. Prince Asfa

Wossen of Ethiopia, the eldest son of Haile Selassie, gave the ring to Marley in 1977 as a token of appreciation.

This ring once belonged to Haile Selassie. Not long after meeting the unemployed prince, who was living in exile London following the dethroning of his father in 1974, Marley donated US\$50,000 to help the prince bring his family from Addis Ababa to London.

He was also honoured with a state funeral in Kingston on May 23 1981. Bob Marley was inducted posthumously into the American Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1994. In 2001, the singer was awarded the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award. That same year, an insightful documentary about his life and music, *Rebel Music*, was nominated for best long-form music video documentary at the 2001 Grammys. In 2006, the City of New York renamed a portion of Church Avenue, between Remsen Avenue and East 98th Street in the East Flatbush Section of Brooklyn, Bob Marley Boulevard. ■

## Marley album discography

*Soul Rebel* (Trojan; Dec 1970) ★  
*African Herbsman* (Trojan; 1972) ★  
*Catch a Fire* (Island; Apr 1973) ★★  
*Burnin'* (Island; Nov 1973) ★★  
*Natty Dread* (Island; May 1975) ★★  
*Live!* (Island; Dec 1975) ★★  
*Rastaman Vibration* (Island; Apr 1976) ★★  
*Exodus* (Island; May 1977) ★★  
*Kaya* (Island; Mar 1978) ★★  
*Babylon by Bus* [live] (Island; Dec 1978) ★  
*Survival* (Island; Oct 1979) ★★  
*Uprising* (Island; Jun 1980) ★★  
*Confrontation* [posthumous] (Island; May 1983) ★  
**Compilations (select)**  
*Rasta Revolution* (Trojan; Jul 1974)  
*Bob Marley – The Boxed Set* [9 LPs] (Island, 1982)  
*Legend: The Best of Bob Marley and the Wailers* (Island; May 1984)  
*Rebel Music* (Island; Jun 1986)  
*Talking Blues* (Tuff Gong; Mar 1991)  
*Songs of Freedom* [box set] (Tuff Gong; Sep 1992)  
*Natural Mystic: The Legend Lives On* (Island; Nov 1995)  
*Chant Down Babylon* [remixes with other artists] (Island; Nov 1999)  
*One Love: The Very Best of Bob Marley and the Wailers* (Universal; May 2001)  
*Roots of a Legend* (Trojan; May 2004)  
*Africa Unite: The Singles Collection* (Island; Nov 2005)  
**The definitive compilation**  
*Legend: The Best of Bob Marley and the Wailers* (Island; May 1984) ★★

## Must-have albums

### The great eight

01 *Catch a Fire* (1973)  
02 *Burnin'* (1973)  
03 *Natty Dread* (1975)

04 *Rastaman Vibration* (1976)  
05 *Exodus* (1977)  
06 *Kaya* (1978)  
07 *Survival* (1979)  
08 *Uprising* (1980)



## The collector's Marley box set

*Songs of Freedom* (Tuff Gong; Sep 1992) ★★

The *Songs of Freedom* box set – released by Island Records in association with Tuff Gong during September-October 1992 – is a worthy investment for the serious Bob Marley and reggae fan. It is a career-spanning compilation of 78 songs over four CDs, starting with Marley's first recorded song, *Judge Not* (1962), and ending with a live version of *Redemption Song*, one of the songs recorded at his last concert performance at Pittsburgh in the USA in September 1980.

This beautifully curated and annotated collection of songs went on to create the world's biggest-selling box set, even outselling the likes of The Beach Boys, The Beatles, Led Zeppelin, Nirvana, Pink Floyd, Elvis Presley and Frank Sinatra. ■



Comprehensive *Exodus* appraisal

## Let's get together and feel alright

Marley explores a broad spectrum of universal issues and moods against a backdrop of alluring music that remains largely fluid, sweet and seductive



**This lengthy and, arguably, indulgent appraisal of *Exodus* is intended to provide deeper insight into, and a better understanding of, the album for passionate followers of Bob Marley and the Wailers, rather than those time-pressed readers with a lighter interest in the group.**

**This comprehensive review should be read in conjunction with the new book edited by Richard Williams, *Exodus: Exile 1977*, published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson of London, as well as some of the books listed on page 12 of edition eleven – none of which I can recommend besides the Timothy White biography, *Catch a Fire*, because it is the only other Marley book I have read cover-to-cover.**

**B**ob Marley and the Wailers' eighth studio album (and their sixth for Island Records), 1977's hypnotisingly joyous and cross-genre-tinged *Exodus*, remains a landmark reggae album, but, sadly, still largely underrated by many rock critics and most likely still capable of garnering mixed reviews and provoking impassioned debate among die-hard Marley and reggae aficionados.

Thirty years later, however, *Exodus* still merits celebration as one of the defining international albums to have emerged from the broader rock, pop, reggae, punk, ska, funk and disco catalogue of the latter 1970s.

Despite the advance of recording technology and significant changes in global culture and policy direction over the last three decades, *Exodus* continues to assert itself ever so sweetly and seductively because it still sounds fresh, inviting and relevant. It is a must-have album – even if slightly flawed – if you are a devout fan of Bob Marley and the Wailers or a serious reggae purveyor.

What is so striking about Bob Marley's short, but prolific songwriting career, which ended so abruptly at the age of 36 in 1981, is the amazing consistency of his works compared not only with many of his reggae contemporaries of the 1970s, but also with many of the big-name rock and singer-songwriter leaders of that decade (whether one wants to revisit the 1970s oeuvres of John Lennon, Pink Floyd, Jethro Tull, Neil Young, Bob Dylan, Elton John or The Beach Boys, for example).

Consistency – as in nurturing a constancy of vision, sustaining integrity of artistic and philosophical or spiritual principles, and maintaining an uncompromising dedication to safeguarding high levels of musical innovation, passionate performances and superlative production – is a rare quality in the big-dollar-signs music industry.

Bob Marley's consistency embraced his lyrics, his melodies and his singing, as well as the instrumental performances of the Wailers and their overall arranging, production and mixing skills between 1972 and 1980.

Most encouragingly, the Wailers never succumbed to making the almost inevitable nadir album that often tarnishes the reputation of big-name artists, as in the case of Bob Dylan's pointless *Dylan* album of 1973 or The Rolling Stones' woefully pedestrian *Emotional Rescue* album of 1980.

### Assimilating new genres

The Wailers' four-month exile in London during the first part of 1977, mostly to give Marley freedom to heal his outer and inner wounds away from the mayhem and malaise of his native Kingston, enabled the group to indulge their musical muse in a more



relaxed, centred and inspired manner. To sweeten and spice their muse, they had an entire new wave of musical themes and grooves to draw on as London entered a daring, new phase of musical innovation and exploration.

Having been based in a predominantly Afro-centric Jamaica and having spent time living and touring in the USA, Marley had soaked up strains of R&B, funk, soul, rock and, of course, additional elements of black-consciousness polemics and protest. Now, London was booming with the eager, new sounds of British reggae, ska, dub, punk and other novel expressions of rock – and many of the tougher songs of this time centred on themes of isolation, ostracism, disenchantment, racism, injustice, economic exploitation and mental, emotional and even physical slavery.

While such themes were far from alien to Marley's agitated heart and mind, they served to reaffirm his relevance as a people's poet and elevate his inherent gift to speak out simply, yet eloquently, on behalf of the enslaved, the disenfranchised, the exploited and the marginalised.

In the wake of its two mostly well-received predecessors, 1975's *Natty Dread* and 1976's *Rastaman Vibration*, Marley and the Wailers adhered to their impassioned drive to write songs of political and social awakening and relevance for *Exodus*, while also exploring another subject dear to Marley's heart: romantic and sexual love.

At the same time, they acknowledged that the bottom line of music (and not its profit-driven host industry) is to indulge in some heartfelt fun and, in the Wailers' case, enjoy those seductive grooves that make good, authentic reggae music so enchanting. For many observers, especially Marley's detractors, this is an artistic paradox and it seemed to pitch higher on *Exodus* (as it would two years later on *Survival*).

### **Making personal polemics palatable**

Here, even if unconsciously, Marley seems to have drawn from the ethos and ideation of other influential singer-songwriters of the 1970s, most notably Bob Dylan, Neil Young, Joni Mitchell and Jackson Browne. Each of these reflective and perceptive North American musicians had his or her own pronounced political convictions, social observations and acutely personal views of angst and disconsolation that they felt compelled to share with their listeners, even if in idiosyncratically obtuse or inscrutable ways.

Yet, these matters did not divert them from making novel and compelling music fuelled by integrity and founded on high songwriting and production standards, as did Young through *On the Beach* (1974) and *Tonight's the Night* (1975), Dylan on *Blood on the Tracks* (1975) and *Desire* (1976), Mitchell on *Court and Spark* (1974) and *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* (1975) and Browne on *Late for the Sky* (1974) and *The Pretender* (1976).

A large portion of the Marley magic stems from his ability to set imploring, urgent and outspoken messages within a framework of music that flows freely, amiably and joyfully – and often with an irresistible dance groove. This characteristic encapsulates the mesmerising power of *Exodus*, even 30 years on.

Marley, as he was prone to do since the early 1970s, raised his mind as a polemicist and his heart as a poet, but never allowed his cherished spiritual and political convictions to detract him from laying down sanguine dance grooves through the spellbinding drums-and-bass combination of the Barrett brothers or to weave a few novel guitar treatments through some of the most ingenious work of the Wailers' lead guitarist, Julian "Junior" Marvin.

Here it should be remembered that the Wailers, at the peak, were powered by one of the most delightful and (in Rasta parlance) "hardest" rhythm sections of the 1970s: Carlton Barrett on drums and Aston "Family Man" Barrett on bass. Anyone who had the opportunity to see the Wailers live in concert, up close, will appreciate how magnificently these brothers could weave the main rhythm so passionately and intuitively, while keeping those sunny grooves rock-steady.

Just as significant to an appreciation of *Exodus* and Marley's wider 1970s oeuvre is his innate ability to shift from the bright stage of political protest and polemics to indulge himself in the more tender matters of romantic love and his yearning for carnal delights, all of which reinforced his adorability and credibility as someone deeply human and accessible.

This poignant and often powerful dichotomy proved to be one of Marley's most potent marketing weapons. It made him and his music more endearing because this dichotomy flowed from his heart without any apparent glimmer of commercial motive or seemingly insatiable hunger for ego-inflation.

Predictably, Marley encountered dissension from some of his hardliner fans and critics about the comparatively generous amount of love songs on *Exodus*. This would become one of the hot topics he would have to defend in interviews. Had he sold out? Had he gone too soft in his political convictions?

### **Adopting a breezier style**

Despite visions of political burden and other onerous issues, Marley and the Wailers approached their *Exodus* / *Kaya* sessions with great conviction and clarity of purpose and opted for a lighter, breezier style, even for some of the more outspoken – if not, markedly barbed – political songs.

While their hearts and minds gravitated instinctively towards a well-enunciated reggae groove, they were adroit at embellishing the *Exodus* songs with strains and nuances of other idioms, including rock, soul, R&B, funk, dub and even a dash of disco – never

mind that otherworldly, seemingly post-psychedelic, blues- and psych-soul-laced guitar atmospherics crafted by Marvin. Sometimes their approach to genre crossovers was subtle; and sometimes it was more daring, as a few of the more explorative guitar musings of Junior Marvin.

On the downside, many critics have remarked that the extended jamming and meandering instrumental performances diluted the inherent potency of *Exodus*, especially if one delves back into Marley and the Wailers' brasher and more pointed music of the earlier 1970s. Is this a serious conceptual flaw – or even a downright unforgivable musical blemish – worth expounding on? Some critics may wish to pursue this argument further, but for me – as with many die-hard *Exodus* fans – this, precisely, is an essential ingredient to the album's charm and longevity, even if the execution and production were flawed at times.

Marley and all five members of the Wailers – along with the tireless I-Threes – seemed to have found some fresh, new depths of joy, abandon, sensitivity and vitality. These fluid, carefree and sometimes almost aimless reggae grooves really reflect how content and chilled they were – outwardly, at least. Even though there are some harsh political messages and a few sombre images associated with the plight of human underdogs, the Wailers seemed to be glowing with a new radiance and brimming over with newfound hope for the future.

### Marley's lack of drama

Some of the criticism levelled against *Exodus* went further, with a few critics denigrating Marley's overall "flat" or "dull" approach to singing his lead vocals. For example, in issue 243 of *Rolling Stone* published on July 14 1977, one of the magazine's long-serving and respected editors, Greil Marcus, bemoaned "the absence of emotion in Marley's voice", adding:

"There are some well-crafted lines here, but given Marley's singing, they don't come across. The precise intelligence one hears in every note of music cannot make up for its lack of drama, and that lack is Marley's."

To a degree, Marcus is right. Revisiting the best songs from the Wailers' 1972-1976 catalogue, as on songs such as *Get Up*, *Stand Up*, *Lively up Yourself*, *Stir It Up*, *War* and *I Shot the Sheriff*, it is possible that Marley did not go all the way in expressing his broader emotional spectrum and re-creating some of the political and personal drama and even the incendiary outrage and angst many of us had come to associate with his best moments of the 1970s.

Frequently in the history of rock, however, artists' dominant moods and preoccupations have shifted from one album to the next – and sometimes with almost breathtaking surprise.

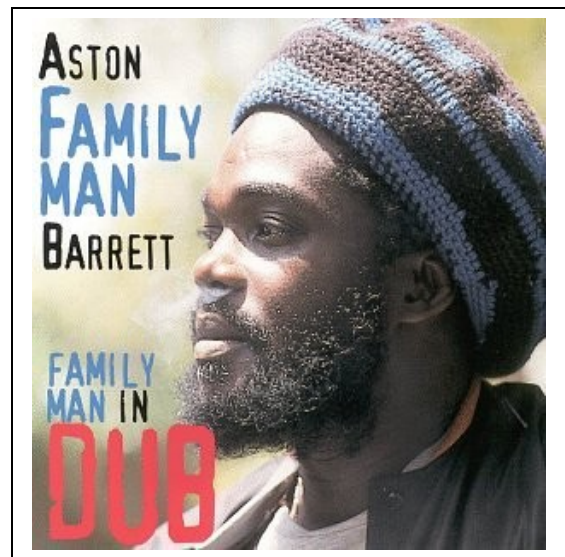
For a brief while towards the end of the 1960s, Bob Dylan quit cigarettes and surprised us with an almost

all-new and boyish countrified voice on *Nashville Skyline*.

In 1970, after the traumatic disintegration of the beloved Beatles and his first marriage, John Lennon took excessive inspiration from his Primal Scream therapy and tried to exorcise all his psychological demons on songs like *Mother*, *I Found Out* and *Working-Class Hero* from his first post-Fabs album, *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band*. The wounded Lennon of 1970 had become a far cry from the tender, pensive and good-humoured post-art school youngster who wrote and sang *In My Life* five years earlier.

A few years later, Canadian singer-songwriter Neil Young lost two close friends to hard drugs – roadie Bruce Berry and original Crazy Horse guitarist Danny Whitten – and proceeded to decolour and defrill his next two albums with some of his most depressingly honest, bleak and gnawed-to-the-bone songs, which formed *On the Beach* (1974) and *Tonight's the Night* (1975).

Where, precisely, was Marley's heart and mind in January and February 1977 when most of the vocals tracks for *Exodus* were recorded? Perhaps Marley is the only one who could ever have provided an honest and simple answer. From accounts of this era – including excerpts from the new *Exodus* book – it seems Marley was safe, secure, relaxed and well spirited during his brief London sojourn.



**Keeping it tight ...** Aston "Family Man" Barrett – a long-time member of the Wailers – not only brought stability and strength to Marley's music as a great bass player and artistic sounding board, but also to his life as a cherished friend and confidant.

The Wailers could hardly have been any tighter, musically or personally. After his familiarity with – and admitted passion for – the hot and humid Caribbean climes, maybe the mid-winter London cold

had chilled some of his spirit or affected his vocal chords.

At the same time, one should not forget the man was wounded, physically and emotionally, having come within an inch of his death just four weeks before he laid down the first of his *Exodus* vocal tracks. He must have been homesick and, more so, worried about the well-being of family and friends left behind in a divided and despairing Kingston. One actually wonders if a traumatised Marley ever exorcised all the pain and indignation that beset his life after that bizarre night at his Hope Road home.

Then there were those usual complex matters of the human heart. Was Marley pining for one of his lovers, one of whom, Cindy Breakspere, is said to have been at the core of his *Exodus* and *Kaya* love songs. Not long after the *Exodus* European tour was completed, she fell pregnant with their child, Damian Marley (born July 21 1978).

### **Sounding arid and vulnerable**

In addition, it is clear that Marley and the Wailers also wanted to take their well-established musical formula in a fresh direction and this notion, by default, would have coloured at least some of his approach to a few of the finer points of singing, such as phrasing, emotional depth and timbre.

His lack of dramatic delivery and finer emotional shadings at times might just be one of the significant points of *Exodus*, as on some of the most charged songs like *Heathen*, where the band peaks musically, but Marley sounds distanced and even aloof. Here, one senses Marley is too preoccupied mentally about his intellectual viewpoint that his personal polemics and platitudes slough off some of his emotional concerns.

Perhaps making a record – and accruing subsequent fame and fortune – in the heart of the Babylon System had a sobering, if not disquieting, effect on some of his own heartfelt preoccupations, such as the much-touted, but unfulfilled, “repatriation” of Jamaican Rastafari adepts to Ethiopia.

At times on *Exodus*, Marley’s voice is arid, raspy and even vulnerable, but it provides tonal contrast to the predominantly fluid and vivacious sounds of the Wailers, while also emphasising a sense of grittiness of thinking and urgency of intention, which emerges on the hypnotic title track, for example.

### **Dealing with contradiction**

On the powerful opening song, *Natural Mystic*, built up slowly from the quiet and stark, almost melancholic urgency of the few opening bars of the metronomically precise “chink-chink” of the rhythm section driven by the Barrett brothers, Marley and lead guitarist, Junior Marvin, collaborate imaginatively to superimpose another dimension. This elevated dimension is built on the sweetly persuasive vocals and the playful, yet haunting, almost B B King-inspired call-and-response-style

lead-guitar motifs kept discreetly cool and cathartic in the background.

Marley implores us to “listen very carefully now” and the soft radiance of the horns – perhaps the muffled trumpets of a biblical Armageddon – subtly strengthen the song’s carefully understated urgency. *Natural Mystic*, however, has a deeper, darker dimension – that menacing undercurrent provided by the strong, singular thread of his lyrics, developed around the notion of contradiction.

Yes, outwardly, Marley, the man and the musician, may sound sanguine and hopeful, but the words of Marley, as the meditative people’s poet, are enshrouded with despair and desperation. Deep down, we sense a singer and poet who is on the verge of being gravely apocalyptic, heralding the collapse of the Babylon System he despised and denigrated so vehemently in many of his songs.

Of course, at his request, one “listens very carefully”, but never quite grasps the meaning of his song. It appeals to insiders of his faith, or as I am inclined to believe, the message is meant to entice, but never really fully inform because the lyrics are not meant to resolve themselves. There is an arcane or esoteric realm inside him where so many facets of life are abstract, even splintered, and unable to be explained or shaped into a higher, more spiritually compelling and cohesive form.

Much of Marley’s more serious music seems to deal with the inexplicable, the unsolvable and the esoteric. As much as the man was preoccupied with Third World suffering and injustice, part of his dilemma – his inherent humanity and even deeper spirituality – was his lack of lucid answers or compelling solutions.

To some extent, at least, his sense of a “natural mystic” seemed to be about placing trust in something that, although invisible to our senses, was nevertheless real – like the notion of the wider laws of a theocentric and benevolent Universe or the etheric presence of an angel or spirit guide.



**Real revolutionary ...** *Marcus Garvey (1887-1940), a Jamaican revolutionary thinker and founder of Jamaica's Rastafari movement in the 1930s, as well as the subject of several outspoken reggae songs. By the 1970s, an estimated five per cent of Jamaicans – about 125 000 people at the time – were either Rastas or Rasta supporters.*

#### **Saluting the real revolutionaries**

The mood, outwardly and musically, at least, lightens when *So Much Things to Say* is heralded, but Marley implores us not to be deceived. This is a political song about "the struggle" – and, besides the disquieting effect of a confused-sounding or improperly conceived musical arrangement and production, he lets us know pointedly with lines like "I'll never forget, no way, they sold Marcus Garvey for rice". Garvey – the founder of Jamaica's modern Rastafari movement – was betrayed by his people and went into exile.

Marley cites another black Jamaican hero, Paul Bogle – an outspoken member of Jamaica's Native Baptist Church – who led an 1860s revolt against the British for their despicable treatment of black labourers. Bogle, too, was betrayed by fellow Jamaicans and later tried and executed. Marley also alludes to the betrayal and crucifixion of Jesus Christ at the hands of Roman oppressors.

Here, Marley subtly reminds us that these iconic and revolutionary figures were all, in some form, ridiculed, denigrated, ostracised and, ultimately, betrayed and persecuted, but later celebrated on the fringes of their societies for the strength of their convictions, the constancy of their purposes and their innate ability to remain robust in the face of hypocrisy and hatred.

Subliminally, one hears Marley's own anguish and pain moving to the fore in the aftermath of the physical, emotional and mental torment that must

have arisen from the failed attempt on his life at his Kingston home in December 1976.



**Another real revolutionary ...** *Reverend Paul Bogle (1822-1865), another revolutionary Jamaican thinker, a minister of the church and a staunch advocate for the emancipation and upliftment of people of African origin.*

The question often asked is: Was Marley not only sympathising with these icons on a spiritual and moral level, but not also pointedly acknowledging his own vulnerability in his native Jamaica where even a humble, pacifist singer and bandleader was at risk of being "martyred" because of his "controversial", although harmless, convictions – his principles devoted to the spiritual, political, social, economic and physical emancipation of his fellow humans?

More than anything, Marley proclaims his innocence in the eyes of a just God with his lines: "It takes true God to prove my innocence / I know the wicked think they found me guilty".

On this song, as with many of his protest songs, Marley relies on biblical references to create a more universal and impersonal quality. For example, he draws on the Rastafari-inspired readings from the Epistles of Paul when he incites listeners to "stand firm". He also draws on the Book of Psalms when he sings "Just remember that / When the rain falls, it don't fall on one man's house".

This is one of Marley's most overtly spiritual protest songs – and, above all the political divisiveness and the folly of his fellow humans, he hoists his Rastafari flag high into the winds when he declares: "But I and I, and I no come to fight flesh and blood / But spiritual wickedness in high and low places / So while, so while, so while they fight you down, stand firm / And give Jah thanks and praises".

These lines encapsulate not only so much of the dominant spirit of *Exodus*, but also the essence of

Marley the man who reminds his followers – notably the Rastafari community – to maintain a dignified defiance by sheltering themselves, spiritually at least, in the eye of the storm and firmly adhering to their beliefs and celebrating the Almighty.

### **Marley: lyrical genius?**

On these lyrical issues, as well as one of Marley's principal approaches to songwriting structure, it is helpful to cite a few apt observations made about Marley by the Jamaican-English singer, poet and thinker Linton Kwesi Johnson in the book, *Exodus*:

"A gifted singer-songwriter, Marley often began his songs with a statement of his topic followed by elaboration and conclusion and restatement in the normal chorus-verse-chorus or verse-chorus-verse structure. Proverbs, aphorisms and sayings of everyday Jamaican speech, together with biblical quotations, provide his metaphors and allusions. Marley's lyrics cannot be read without being heard. His rendition of his songs, the way he uses his voice, provide clues to his meaning. His method of composition is oral and improvisatory."

Johnson later adds: "Marley's 'lyrical genius' [*borrowed from Kwame Dawes*] lies in his ability to translate the personal into the political, the private into the public, the particular into the universal with a seeming simplicity that guarantees accessibility. The lyrics of the songs from *Exodus* are ample evidence of this."

This quality is notably stronger on the more political songs, particularly on *Heathen*.

Johnson is not the only Jamaican-born thinker and poet to have eulogised Marley as a poet and emissary for spiritual transcendence and political transformation. In his explorative and illuminating, although at times taxing and effusive, analysis of Marley's lyrical tradition in his book, *Bob Marley: Lyrical Genius*, author Kwame Dawes reflects on his discovery of the *Exodus* album as a teenager growing up in Kingston:

"I was studying the lyrics. I was haunted by the fact that these lyrics were moments of sublime poetry, rich with metaphor, thick with allusions, elevated by biblical references and fired by passion and energy. I was studying Marley like I was studying the poetry of Gerald Manley Hopkins in school, and Marley was putting the old Oxford don to shame."

It is debatable whether students of serious literature would want to define Marley as a "lyrical genius" or as an "exceptionally gifted poet" in the sense of Hopkins, Walt Whitman, Dylan Thomas, T S Eliot, Ted Hughes or Allen Ginsberg, for example. It is also debatable whether serious followers of post-1950s "protest" music would want to place Marley in the same class as Bob Dylan at his creative best between 1963 and 1968.

Good lyric writing – as with good poetry or good prose – is defined by personal taste, experience and need, and the extent to which the listener or reader embraces them with spontaneous admiration, empathy and emotional, cerebral and/or spiritual upliftment or enrichment.

What is remarkable about Marley's lyric writing – as exemplified by the better lines on *Exodus* – is the distinctive combination of its earnest simplicity, efficiency, directness and delightful lack of scholarly pretensions or affectations, which is something that marred some of the lysergically twisted, French Romanticism-inspired lyrics written by Jim Morrison for *The Doors*. There were times when Morrison's poetic vision succumbed to pretentiousness and pseudo-scholarliness, if not sheer ponderous crap.

Growing up in Jamaica and trying to eke out a living just to keep your life above the breadline, the studies of gifted and erudite foreign poets – probably viewed as "the incomprehensible and ponderous voices of the oppressors" – would have washed over many people's minds: not because they lacked intelligence, empathy or inquisitiveness, but simply because they had more important things to do – and their culture was far too divorced from high-browed poetry that needed a remarkable grasp of the English language and the social malaise of the times in which the relevant poems were created.

Remember, too, that many Jamaicans of the time – as with many other people in poor countries – were not educated to a notably high or advanced level. Nor were they brought up to speak a deeply eloquent style of English with a vast vocabulary, as was the case of a young Marley, who grew up tough in squalor and left school at the age of 14.

Despite the young age at which he left school and his lack of deep poetic studies (we assume from a traditional Western viewpoint), there is no doubting that Marley was an intelligent, curious, perceptive, just and even deeply intuitive and instinctive person capable of searching for his own understandings and meanings of life issues, and then proceeding to grapple with the niceties of language – within the context of popular music's comparatively rigid verse-and-chorus restrictions – until he found the right words, with the appropriate images and resonance, to encapsulate what weighed on his mind or raged in his heart.

### **A man of the people**

On the surface, Marley's words were simple and earthy – and never lofty or ever hinting of any propensity to reach out for the scholarly, the erudite or the elitist. He was a man of the people and a man of the streets – a man of clear and simple political, social and spiritual convictions, so his words and imagery would be kept simple, even if he was tackling – or hoping to resolve in part, at least – some of the more complex or agonising political or moral issues of his fragmented political and social milieu.



As Linton Kwesi Johnson rightly emphasises, the listener needs to take his or her cue from Marley's various styles of singing ... the emphasis of certain Marleyesque keywords, his matter-of-fact dryness in delivering a particular line, his exaggeration, in a rootsy Jamaican patois, of a particular word, his frenetic chorus refrains, and even his melodramatic torturing of a particular vowel. Such sensibilities – or foibles – helped to shape much of *Exodus*, both in terms of intellectual meaning and emotional appeal.

With some of these thoughts in mind, it is clear that on *So Much Things to Say* that Marley really has a lot on his mind and it is going to be difficult, if not downright impossible, to pour all these matters out and shape them into one coherent stream of messages within the framework of a simple reggae song. The title, alone, reflects his anguish and mental clutter – and excuses him from trying to become too effusive or all-embracing in expressing what preoccupies him so much.

The vehement and visceral *Guiltiness* is, in Marley's Rastafari viewpoint, a prophetic, karmic-themed song of admonishment to the world's oppressors – whom he, Peter Tosh and other reggae artists preferred to call "downpressors" to distinguish the word "down" from "up" ("op") in Jamaican patois. Addressing them as "the big fish" "who always try to eat down the small fish", he warns: "Woe to the downpressors. They'll eat the bread of sorrow."

This is one of the notably hypnotic songs on *Exodus* as it sways from side to side with metronomic precision, while Marley ensures he retains a high degree of refrain with the lines "They'll eat the bread of sorrow" and "They'll eat the bread of sad tomorrow".

### Keeping the messages biblical

On a notably seething, if not downright scathing and unrelenting *The Heathen*, Marley keeps his indignation fuelled and bassist Aston Barrett underscores the militant atmosphere with an almost martial style to playing his ominous bass lines. This song flows logically from *Guiltiness*, and the downpressors with their guiltiness are now the heathens with their backs to the wall ("De heathen back dey 'pon de wall!").

Again, Marley extends his karmic theme, or reference to the higher laws of cause and effect, with another common biblical reference, "As a man sow, shall he reap". Even though Marley sees the heathens as the victor who, materially, is not left wanting anything, this song is his call for retribution and therefore the restoration of the common folks' dignity and rights to share in the prosperity of the planet, free from greed and exploitation.

This mesmerisingly urgent and imploring song features some of the Wailers' richest and most explorative guitar and keyboard tapestries, notably

the piquantly atmospheric mood pieces by lead guitarist Marvin and keyboardist Tyrone Downie.

On the call-to-march title track, *Exodus*, the Wailers step on the gas and intensify their sense of urgency and purpose with the aid of additional percussive cross-rhythms, short, radiant bursts of brass, gravely inciting male backing vocals (without any contrapuntal softening from the female voices of the I-Threes) and the clever interspersing of vibrant, funk-inflected guitar and keyboard chatter in what is one of the album's liveliest and most frenetic arrangements.

At last, we sense that Marley has a vision – inspired, of course, by his deep Rastafari convictions – of better times on the horizon as he cries out, "Wipe away transgression / Set the captives free", and chants passionately and incessantly, "Movement of Jah people".

Despite political procrastination and the obvious lack of treasury resources back home in Jamaica, he does not lose his deeply cherished optimism, along with a profound spirit of confrontation and incitement, that some day, perhaps before too long, that he and his Rasta brethren will have the opportunity to journey to Ethiopia and find their asylum – to complete their pilgrimage to their promised biblical land or earthly paradise – away from a bloodsucking Babylon System with its obsessive materialistic concerns.

## Jamming with Julian



**Marley's deft musical colourist ...** *The Wailers' ultra-cool lead guitarist, Julian "Junior" Marvin (born Donald Hanson Marvin Kerr Richards, junior), played a key role in enriching the sound of the band and providing a sympathetic backdrop to Marley's core vision. In particular, he added immense colour and intrigue to many of the Exodus songs, including The Heathen, Exodus and Waiting in Vain.*

*Marvin also contributed his excellent guitar work to recording sessions for Steve Winwood and several major reggae acts, including Burning Spear, Don Carlos, Culture, Joe Higgs, Israel Vibration, Toots and the Maytalls, and former Wailer, Bunny Wailer. Prior to joining the Wailers, he was based in the USA where he played for the backing bands of T-Bone Walker and Stevie Wonder, hence his ability to inject into the Wailers' sound elements of blues, soul, R&B, funk and other genres associated with African-American music.*

### Enjoying spiritual celebration

On the mellower, less intricate and dub-flavoured *Jamming*, Marley and the Wailers cool the tempo and stretch out to enjoy a few languid moments of spiritual celebration approaching a sense of metaphysical or moral victory in ethos. Lead guitarist Marvin even spices the song with delicate touches of blues phrasings.

Yet, at the same time, Marley reminds us that sobering thoughts are at the front of his mind when he sings lines such as "Jah Jah children must unite / For life is worth much more than gold". Amid the festive call to unite in Spirit, he asserts that the faithful should not be diverted from their higher spiritual quests by the allure of money and materialism.

Significantly, this is the topic he addressed as his "farewell thought" or parting shot before passing on to higher spiritual realms in May 1981.

Again, Marley cannot ignore the recent attempt on his life when he opens one of the midway verses with the line "No bullet can stop us now", one of the song's joyously defiant lines that seems to assert that nothing is vulnerable in the protected, non-material realms of Spirit.

Jamming – in the musical sense – is a means towards achieving freedom and spontaneity of expression, qualities that can bring one's consciousness closer to experiencing some personal sense of the metaphysical, the magical and the non-binding – almost like approaching the blissful fringes of what yogis call *samadhi*.

On another level – not forgetting that Marley had a strong sexual appetite and was reputed in several accounts to have been a lascivious lover and even a serial philanderer – jamming is an obvious sexual reference, again with an emphasis on finding emancipation from the prosaic and onerous and therefore delighting in some inner form of catharsis or release.

### Being unburdened

On the seductively warm, tender and sincere *Waiting in Vain*, Marley has seldom sounded so imploring, direct and unashful in his pronouncements of human love. Here, Marley writes and delivers a

traditional, straight-from-the-heart love song that cannot possibly pretend to be anything else. In this case, oral tradition suggests that this song was addressed to one of his absent lovers, Cindy Breakspere. Here, our ears savour the intimate, love-hungry Marley who sets aside his more overt preoccupations with his spiritual faith and political convictions.

The tender mood flows into *Turn Your Lights Down Low*, yet his passion blazes more strongly than the music suggests when he sings lines like "Oh, let my love come tumbling in / Into your life again". This is about as close as you get to hear Marley as the bedroom charmer and seducer who takes time out to rest his rallying political voice, as well as his more overt devotions to Jah.

The bright, breezy and almost over-poppified *Three Little Birds* is the Wailers ode to living freely and shows just how fluid, joyous, humorous and unburdened they could be. And why not? At heart, Marley and the Wailers were infectious – so why not write and perform a simple, infectious song that celebrates the beauty of everyday living such as the arrival of three little birds on Marley's doorstep?

Marley and the Wailers bring *Exodus* full-circle with their optimistically anthemic *One Love/People Get Ready*, the latter part of which was written by the politically sussed US soul singer-songwriter, Curtis Mayfield. After exploring a spectrum of spiritual, political, moral and romantic concerns, the group brings their classic 1977 album to an exuberant and positive finale with a song of spiritual hope, praise and triumph.

In hindsight, the *Time* magazine editors were brazened in naming *Exodus* as their music album of the twentieth century. Obviously, in weighing their criteria, they must have placed much emphasis on political conscience and social relevance, as well as a global, cross-cultural appeal. Logically, it is difficult for any of us to shortlist and concur, with pure consensus, our ideas for albums of a century, given our divergent personal tastes, experiences and needs.

But it is fair to assert that *Exodus* touched the hearts and minds of millions of people around the globe and played a catalytic role not only in inspiring many of us to widen our musical tastes, but also to expand our personal world views on topical subjects of the day, most notably the plight of Third World suffering and the growing divide between the richer northern nations and the poorer southern ones.

In this respect, Marley was true wayfarer and messiah, if not a true African Renaissance poet – benign qualities that help to keep the inherent luminosity of *Exodus* glowing 30 years after its release. ■

### **Exodus ratings**

In the most curious – and seemingly bizarre – of all ratings, *Time* magazine named *Exodus* as its “album of the twentieth century”. The album is rated 168/500 in *Rolling Stone’s 500 Greatest Albums of All Time* (edited by Joe Levy; Wenner Books, 2005). The album is rated 936/1,000 in the third edition of Colin Larkin’s *All-Time Top 1,000 Albums* (Virgin, 2000). The album was rated 602/1,000 in the first edition of 1998 and 391/1,000 in the second edition of 1998.

In his book, *The Essential Rock Discography* (Canongate, 2006), Martin C Strong rates the album’s appeal 8/10. The album has a four-star rating in the fourth edition of *The Rolling Stone Album Guide* (edited by Nathan Brackett; Fireside Books, 2004). The album is also listed in the book, *1,001 Albums You Must Hear Before You Die* (edited by Robert Dimery; Cassell Illustrated, 2005). In 2001, the British television network, VH1, named *Exodus* the 26th greatest album of all time. ■

## Deluxe 2CD edition

The thirtieth-anniversary edition released in 2007 with the book, *Exodus: Exile 1977*, contains two bonus tracks: an extended version of *Jamming* plus the extended version of *Punky Reggae Party*, the original version of which formed the B-side of the *Jamming* single released in December 1977. For the collector, a better choice is the special two-CD, 25-track deluxe edition released in 2001.

## Exodus in the new millennium



## Universal gives Marley stick

**A**mid the ongoing debate about the future viability of the compact disc (CD) as a medium for marketing music and the legal, moral, technical and economic niceties of downloading music from various music websites around the globe, Island Records – a member of the giant Universal Music Group – has added a new dimension to the debate with its recent

release of Bob Marley and the Wailers’ *Exodus* album on a pen-cap-sized USB memory stick.

According to recent online music-news sources, this is believed to be the first time that a music album by a non-contemporary artist has been released in two new formats – as a USB memory stick (also known as a flash disk) and as a micro SD card.

Island has released a mere 4,000 copies of the album on memory stick with a black-and-white portrait of Marley overtinted with the Rastafari colours of green, yellow and red (pictured above). As a bonus, the stick-version of the album features three music videos taken from one of Marley and the Wailers’ 1977 shows at London’s Rainbow Theatre.

Hard-hit by diminishing sales of CDs with the proliferation of digital music sites on the Internet over the last 10 years, as well as the ease of copying music on today’s home computers, the record industry may just be trying to enjoy its final flurry in finding sustainable ways of reviving and rebuilding flagging sales, particularly in the youth market.

*Who really gives a damn?* Joni Mitchell – a frequent critic of the music industry – referred to the industry, not so long ago, as “a cesspool”, which of course was a polite understatement! Given that far too much of the international music industry – controlled by gargantuan, super-capitalist entertainment groups like BMG, EMI, Sony, Warner and Universal – has built itself into multitrillion-dollar, ultra-fat-cat industry with thousands of artists living in a rarefied atmosphere of excessive wealth, it is about time that these high-flying dinosaurs got their scaly selves back down to Earth and started thinking seriously about drastically slashing the prices of CDs and, again, bringing affordable music back to the people – the source of the word “pop”.

This is particular relevant given that most of today’s music is marketed at, and bought by, listeners younger than 30. While I respect and support the rights of artists, composers, producers and other creative people in the music industry to earn a fair living and to enjoy copyright protection, it is high time for a radical transformation of the way music is packaged, priced and marketed.

Based on the status quo, the industry is at severe risk of collapsing – and has only itself to blame. The overriding malady is G-R-E-E-D (“get richer exponentially every day”) and, unless, this severe flaw is transmuted into something more benign and enlightened soon, then this industry, at best, will have to endure its self-inflicted sufferings.

Maybe some of those ultra-fat-cats who head these mega entertainment groups should reflect on much of the essence of what Bob Marley conveyed in his lyrics. Listen to *The Heathen* – track four on *Exodus* – because you outmoded extreme capitalists really do have your backs to the wall! ■



**In memory of Bob Marley – Tuff Gong**

**Written and published** by Michael Waddacor ©  
Hocky Avenue, Northcliff, 2195, Johannesburg

Phone: 0027 (0)11 888 1226 (office)  
or 0027 (0)84 457 7133 (mobile)  
Email: [waddacor@telkomsa.net](mailto:waddacor@telkomsa.net)  
Visit [www.rock.co.za/strangebrew](http://www.rock.co.za/strangebrew)

**Thank you, Brian Currin, of SA Rock Digest**

**Listen to Benjy Mudie's *Rock of Ages* show  
broadcast by Radio 2000 on Thursday nights**

© **Copyright:** Unless otherwise clearly indicated,  
all text in this newsletter, Michael Waddacor's  
*Strange Brew*<sup>™</sup>, is protected by international  
copyright and may not be sold, copied or  
reproduced in any manner or form without the  
prior written consent of the publishing editor.