

# PRODUCERS' PERSPECTIVE

A recording project in Port Antonio, Jamaica, brings together the best talent on either side of the Atlantic as well as provides an interesting perspective on the music world.

Early 2004 saw some of the world's leading dance music producers coming to Jamaica over a period of two months to work face to face with some of the island's leading reggae and dancehall talent. The project was the brainchild of Mark Jones

whose London based record label, Wall of Sound, has consistently been at the leading edge of dance music. A chance meeting with Jon Baker, the owner of Geejam Studios, made the project a reality. The result is an album called *Two Culture Clash* that will be on the shelves by September. From the electronic world artists include, Jacques Lu Cont, City Hifi, Roni Size, Jon Carter, DJ Gregory, Kid 606, Soulchild, Motorbass, Mark Rae, Switch, West London Deep, Howie B and Justin Robertson. And in the Jamaican corner there's Horace

Andy, Earnest Ranglin, Miss Thing, Patra, Ward 21, Bling Dawg, General Degree, Ce'Cile, Spragga Benz, Big Youth, Danny English, Determine, Nadine Sutherland, Tanya Stevens, Innocent Kru and Barrington Levy.

The project also provided an opportunity to talk with the producers visiting Jamaica. A recurring theme was the sheer volume of creative productivity that happens here. Producer Howie B tells me, "I am always surprised at the amount of productivity that happens in Jamaica, you would think that people might just sit in the sun but that's not the case, I once recorded a complete 15 track album here with Sly and Robbie in one week!"

UK dance producer, Justin Robertson adds that, "Jamaica has

to be one of the most productive pieces of music real estate in the world which I think has something to do with the combination of the island's beauty with enough tension for the subject matter to be there, a kind of edgy paradise."

Recording artists coming to Jamaica to work with, and be inspired by, local artists is nothing new. There has been a continual flow of collaborations and interpretations since 1950's mento music. Some argue convincingly that modern dance and hip hop music has been bred from Jamaican DNA. The technique of stripping out vocals leaving bare beats with bass and lead instruments dropping in the mix pioneered by King Tubby or Lee Perry remains a fundamental for the production of modern dance music.

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← JUSTIN ROBERTSON

MARK JONES →

← HOWIE B

DAVE HEDGER →

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The toasting over these beats exported to New York by Jamaicans such as DJ Kool Herc inspired the beginnings of rap music. So it's no surprise that foreign artists want to come to the source.

Robertson says, "From my point of view, the recording techniques pioneered by Jamaican dub engineers is an integral part of how modern electronic dance music is made"; a point also made by Hedger, "Especially the earlier dub sound, the Jamaicans mastered the art of mix-down manipulation, I still apply those techniques today using analogue mixing desks and tape delays."

Label boss, Mark Jones puts it like this, "Without the Jamaican dub pioneers and then people like Joe

Meek and Phil Spector, dance music wouldn't exist."

But the musical direction is not a one-way street there has been a trend over recent years in dancehall to sample international pop and rock tunes to build the riddims that artists voice over. Who would have imagined that Beenie Man would be *zumzumming* over Faltermeyer's "Axel F" or Elephant Man over "Eye of The Tiger" or artists like Ce'Cile and Sizzla voicing over a sample from British 80's Indie band The Cure?

Sampling is at the heart of modern digital dancehall and this inevitably brings with it the potential for lawyers to sort out. But this also raises the question over the differences in industry practices

between Jamaica and the international music business. Jamaican recording artists typically voice or play for an upfront fee rather than a cut on publishing royalties which is the model for most of the record buying world. So it's quite possible for an artist to receive, say, US\$500 for a record that goes platinum in Europe.

Howie B is against this practice, "I'm aware of that model and I disagree with it so the only way I can do something about it is to actively be there and make sure that the Jamaican artists get their fair share."

Justin Robertson does point out an advantage however: "I don't think that it's necessarily fair but I think there is something to be said to

taking the money up front as not all records make money and there's no legal hassle or lawyers, etc."

Says Mark Jones, "Since the dawn of time that's how it's been in Jamaica, unlike Europe artists aren't signed solely to one record label, it's like hiphop. From my perspective as a record company it works both ways. I've worked with people whom we've paid a ton of money and the record wasn't a huge success. But at the end of the day if a record explodes everything gets revisited contractually. I'm sure Sean Paul doesn't work on a session deal these days. On this album, the split between the label and the producers is 50/50 and negotiations at the Jamaican end were via Geejam Studios."

"As long as there's record company sharks about, they will try it on, Bob Marley once said 'stand up for your rights'—do it," advises Dave Hedger of West London Deep. This seems like good advice across all borders. ☺

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