

performers

paul
simon

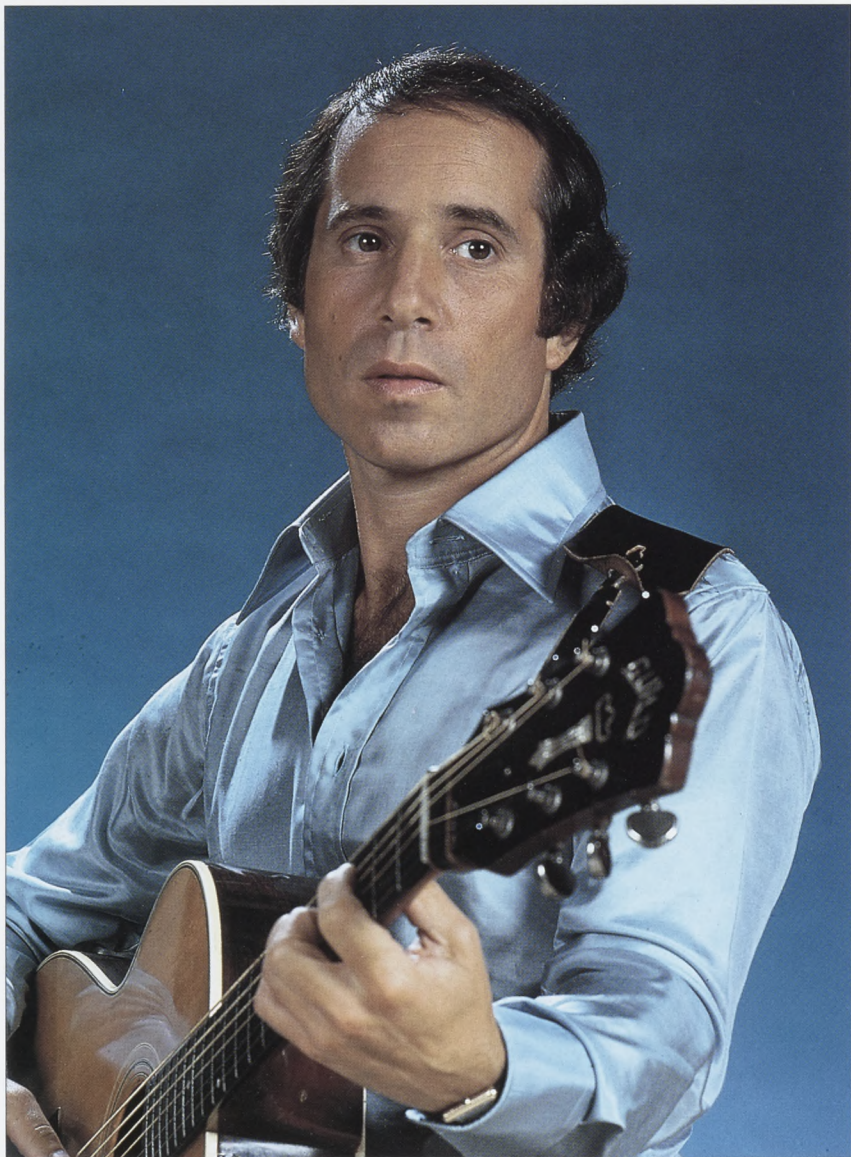
By Anthony
DeCurtis

HAS ALWAYS

• been quick to point out that his
• public career as the songwriting
• half of Simon and Garfunkel es-
• sentially lasted six years, from
• the release of *Wednesday Morning, 3*
• *A.M.* in 1964 to the valedictory of
• *Bridge Over Troubled Water* in 1970.
• The work Simon and Garfunkel
• did during those years will al-
• ways loom large in the history of
• popular music, and it is why the
• two men were elected to the Rock
• and Roll Hall of Fame in 1990.



THIS YEAR, Paul Simon enters the Hall of Fame on the strength of the extraordinary music he has made in the past three decades, a period five times as long as the run Simon and Garfunkel enjoyed. Simon's solo career is a more restless, more complex journey than that of Simon and Garfunkel. That earlier body of songs has been locked in the amber of people's memories as a chronicle of the Sixties' descent from innocence and hopefulness to crestfallen realism. "Bridge Over Troubled Water" is a powerful hymn of solace, and the impending breakup of Simon and Garfunkel is just one of the losses that lends that song its resonance. Along with the Beatles' "Let It Be" and the Rolling Stones' "You Can't Always Get What You Want," it is one of the great elegies for the Sixties dream. Indeed, the breakup of Simon and Garfunkel, like the breakup of the Beatles, marked the symbolic end of an era.



The burden of that history, the wealth of those deeply personal associations, is the first problem Simon had to overcome when he set out on his own. He was particularly daunted by the prospect of trying to follow up *Bridge Over Troubled Water* by himself. Consequently, on his first two solo albums, Simon consciously set out to lower expectations. Even their titles, *Paul Simon* (1972) and *There Goes Rhymin' Simon* (1973), reintroduce by name someone the singer fears his audience may have forgotten or no longer care about. Those albums are not the sweeping statements people had come to expect from Simon and Garfunkel. They are, instead, collections of songs - in some cases, excellent songs on the order of "Mother and Child Reunion" (a title lifted from a chicken-and-egg dish on the menu of a Chinese restaurant), "Duncan," "Me and Julio Down by the Schoolyard," "Something So Right," "American Tune" and "Loves Me Like a Rock."

Those albums are really most notable for the degree to which Simon expanded his musical palette. The gentle, folk-rock pastels of Simon and Garfunkel - still evident on "American Tune," for example - were now just part of the picture. Simon explored his interest in reggae, blues and gospel, exercising a curiosity about new sounds that would eventually become one of his signatures. If he had not yet made the album that would raise his solo career to a stature equal to that of Simon and Garfunkel, he had, at the very least, declared and established his independence. There could be no confusing Paul Simon with Simon and Garfunkel.

Still Crazy After All These Years (1975) represented a more dramatic step forward. Not only was Simon's writing impressively assured - adding a catchphrase to the language, for one thing - the album caught the romantic malaise of the Seventies as tellingly as Simon and Garfunkel had defined the Sixties. Interestingly, both the title track and "Have a Good Time" were offered for use in *Shampoo*, Warren Beatty's own depiction of the Seventies as a sumptuous hell of sexual indulgence, though neither song was used. There may well have been, as Simon immortally put it, "50 Ways to Leave Your Lover," but such freedom came at a price. Simon's idle rendering of the line "I fear I'll do some damage one fine day" in "Still Crazy" suggests how costly that price may prove to be.

For the next ten years, Simon would seem to lose focus, or at least to wander in a variety of directions. He switched record companies. He wrote, starred in and composed the music for the film *One Trick Pony*. The movie was poorly received, though Simon's songs for it were justifiably praised, a judgment he would encounter again. Simon and Garfunkel reunited for a stadium tour. Simon's 1983 album *Hearts and Bones* failed commercially despite the presence of some of his greatest songs - including the title track, "Train in the Distance" and "Rene and Georgette Magritte With Their Dog After the War."

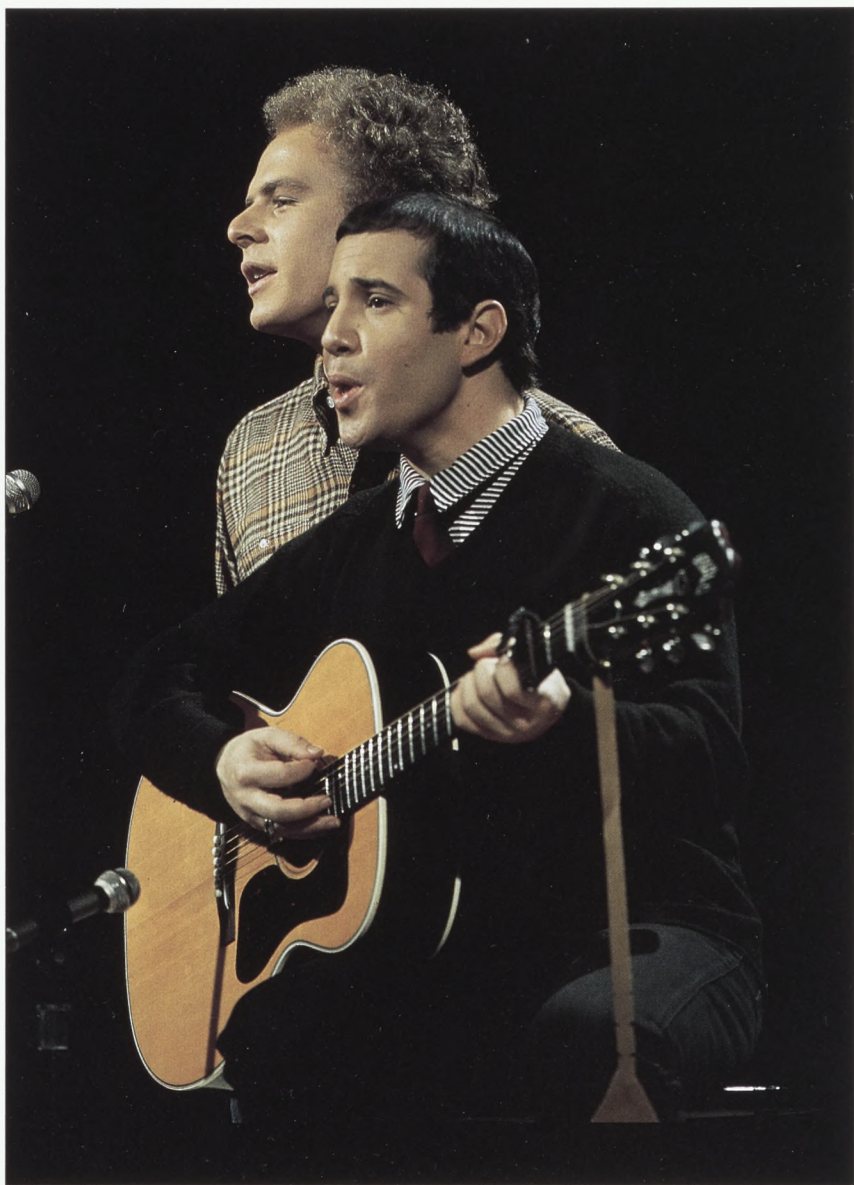
So when a new sound caught his ear toward the end of that period, he figured he'd travel to South Africa to work with some of

the musicians who had created it. He felt that he had nothing to lose, that he had fallen so far below the commercial radar that he was free to do whatever he wanted. The result of that decision, of course, was *Graceland* (1986), an album that had an enormous musical, political and social impact. When it first came out and the story of its making became public, Simon was roundly attacked for violating the cultural boycott of South Africa declared by the African National Congress, the organization that was leading the struggle against the brutal apartheid system. Never one to back down from a fight, Simon insisted that African musicians had invited him to their country and he had no intention of apologizing.

Soon that debate receded and *Graceland's* brilliance became evident. Simon and his African collaborators had created a sound no one had heard before. The propulsive rhythmic force and the sheer exuberance of the music freed Simon to blend surreal imagery ("Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes") with lyrics that limned the postmodern way we live now ("The way the camera follows us in slo-mo/The way we look to us all"), the simultaneous sense of acting, observing and being observed.

It should also be noted that, the issue of the boycott aside, *Graceland* generated undeniably positive cultural effects. While it did not overtly address political issues, its global point of view ran inspiringly counter to the xenophobia of the Reagan years in America. The album energized interest in African music and, indirectly, cast a damning light on the criminal abuses of apartheid. In all ways it was a spectacular achievement.

Following *Graceland* seemed no more possible than following *Bridge Over Troubled Water*, and as he had in the mid-Seventies and early Eighties, Simon seemed pulled by competing impulses. In 1990, he released *Rhythm of the*



Saints, an album that was more of a companion piece to *Graceland* than a move beyond it. He reunited once again with Garfunkel for a series of shows in New York City. More audaciously, in 1997 he undertook the staging on Broadway of *The Capeman*, a musical about the youth gang warfare that plagued New York in the late Fifties and early Sixties. As with *One Trick Pony*, the play was not well received, though Simon's soundtrack fared far better with critics.

Simon got back on track when he hit the road with Bob Dylan in the spring of 1999. Splitting the spotlight with Dylan seemed to relax Simon, and he rediscovered his love for performing live. *You're the One*, the album he released last year, seemed similarly easeful. Less concerned with making a grand statement, Simon wrote an album about love and its discontents that also acknowledged the joys that love can bring. And while the album

Opposite: Simon, 1977; Above: Simon and Garfunkel; Ladysmith Black Mambazo

doesn't flaunt its international airs, it's subtly informed by all the musical styles Simon has explored over the years. *You're the One* earned Simon a Grammy nomination in the Album of the Year category.

The album truly came alive, however, when Simon took it on the road with his extraordinary eleven-piece band. His players evinced an infallible ear for every rhythmic nuance in Simon's songs, and the shows regularly exploded into ecstasy, with audiences both young and old happily dancing. Simon himself couldn't resist the shows' momentum - he was more animated than he had ever been onstage.

"I have reason to believe/We all will be received in *Graceland*," Simon has promised. Now inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, he's gotten there himself. And on the strength and inclusive spirit of his recent live shows, he seems determined to take the rest of us there with him.

catch a fire

By Roger
Steffens



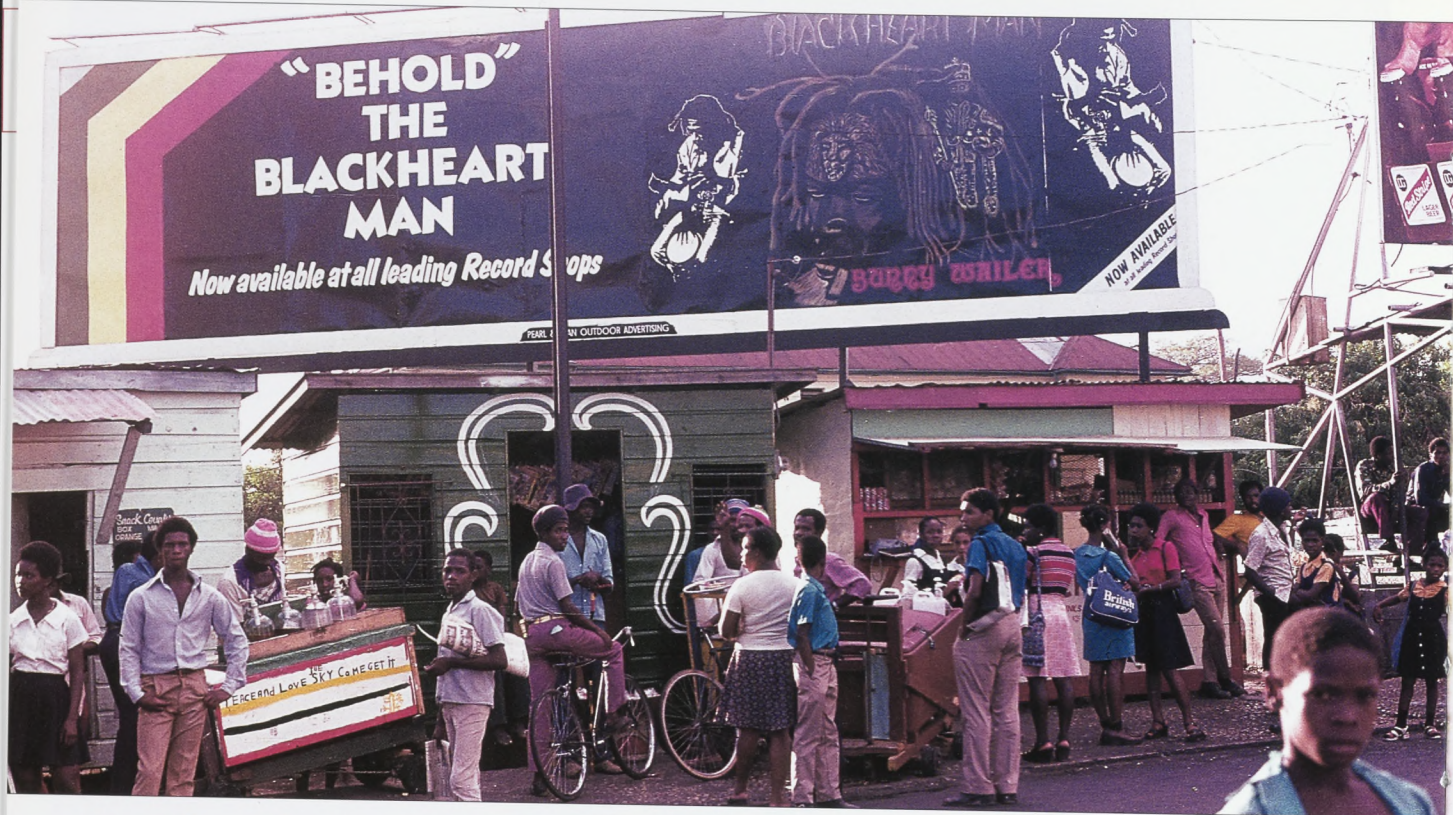
rock meets reggae

IT'S THE HEIGHT of a clammy summer in 1976. My wife, Mary, and I are driving through Tennessee on a cross-country trip to our home in Los Angeles, fresh from a frustrating, three-week search for reggae music in Jamaica. We had encountered José Feliciano singing "California Dreamin'" on the Montego Bay Airport PA system on our arrival, and in the minibus to our destination,



The Wailers in Jamaica,
1971: Aston Barrett, Bob
Marley, Carlton "Carly"
Barrett, Bunny
Livingstone, Peter Tosh
(né MacIntosh) (L to R)

we heard a succession of C&W artists ranging from Hank Williams and Patsy Cline to Gale Garnett and Nancy Sinatra. Jamaican radio proved to be bereft of any reggae we could discover. Where was the reggae?



A billboard in Kingston, Jamaica, advertises Bunny (Livingstone) Wailer's debut solo album, 'Blackheart Man,' released by Island Records in 1976; Below: Bob Marley and the Wailers' 1976 LP

WE DECIDE TO STOP for lunch in Nashville and spot an old brick building with a fading sign: ERNEST TUBB'S RECORD STORE. As we draw abreast, we see a huge display window filled top to bottom with burlap sacks. Printed on each one is the unmistakable image of a fierce-looking man with dreadlocks poised beneath a blood-red logo. The image on the burlap proves to be the distinctive cover chosen for what will be Bob Marley's - and reggae's - highest-charting album ever (Number Eight pop), and the logo is its title: *Rastaman Vibration*.

Wow, we think, the heart-beat strains of reggae are really penetrating the heartland. In San Francisco, a few days later, we fall by Kingston Records, a new shop run by our old friend Ruel Mills. As we recount our trip, Ruel smiles slyly and says with a laugh, "You have fe leave Jamaica fe find Jamaica."

Reggae was the natural inheritor of the socially conscious vibes of the Sixties. No other music of the Seventies so successfully preached and pranced simultaneously, catching the listener in its uplifting outlook, its unwavering belief in the unity of God in man and nature, and, of course, its abiding worship of the sacrament: Call it joint or spliff, bong or chalice, the herbal connection bonded the cultural handshake, as

reggae revived flower power and rolled in the buds, stems and seeds.

But Bob Marley saw a distinction, too, as he surveyed the growing, mostly white tide of reggae converts in the mid-Seventies. "Rastamon him not like hippie. . . . Him hold-a on long time an' hippie no hold-a on, him fail. De hippie should-a hold on five more year until we come. Den dem hippies be de Rastamon, too!"

Unlike the recipients of the earlier infusion of ska and rock steady into Great Britain (when a wave of Jamaican laborers immigrated with families and various infectious Blue Beat 45s in tow), American ears had to wait until 1969 to hear Jah music. In that year, Desmond Dekker and the Aces cracked the U.S. Top Ten with the unlikely, Old Testament-inspired "Israelites," a summertime novelty tune in the context of the Beatles' "Get Back," Zager and Evans's "In the Year 2525" and other hits of the day. But it marked the first ripple of the one-drop wave to crash onto American shores a few years later. Bobby Bloom's soulful lament "Montego Bay" (1970), Johnny Nash's one-million-seller "I Can See Clearly Now" and Paul Simon's Kingston-recorded "Mother and Child Reunion" (both 1972) provided other signposts along reggae's early-Seventies inroads into the United States, culminating in Eric Clapton's chart-topping if rock-blunted cover of Marley's "I Shot the Sheriff" in September 1974.

My personal conversion to reggae began one particular week in the summer of 1973 when a triple-punch knockout hit me in the



form of an article, a movie and an album. *Rolling Stone* published an essay by Australian journalist Michael Thomas on his Jamaican journey – speaking of a deeply philosophical music maker named Marley, an equally profound and life-loving countryman named Cunchyman and an exotic, naturalistic yet serious religion called Rastafarian. Perry Henzell's rude-boy epic *The Harder They Come*, starring Jimmy Cliff, with its high-powered soundtrack, opened in a little theater on the north side of the UC-Berkeley campus. I sat with a full house of scruffy posthippies in an atmosphere that became cloudy and cloudier as the story unfolded and the music raved on. The following day, down on Shattuck Avenue, I picked up a used copy of Bob Marley and the Wailers' *Catch a Fire* for a couple of bucks, cheap enough to take the chance.

That was it. From its eerie fade-in, sneaking like a thief in the night, until its final midnight-raving denouement, I sat speechless as I heard music so odd yet strangely familiar. The rhythm was backward, the off-beat emphasized, the blunt bass licks coiled thickly into the lead guitar, echoing the melody one or two beats behind. And those voices! Bunny Wailer, Peter Tosh and, of course, Marley – half singing, half chanting the ethereal, plaintive vocal triad that is the foundation of Jamaican harmony. "Iron sharpen iron," as they say in Jamaican patois to describe the finely honed effect of the reggae vocal technique.

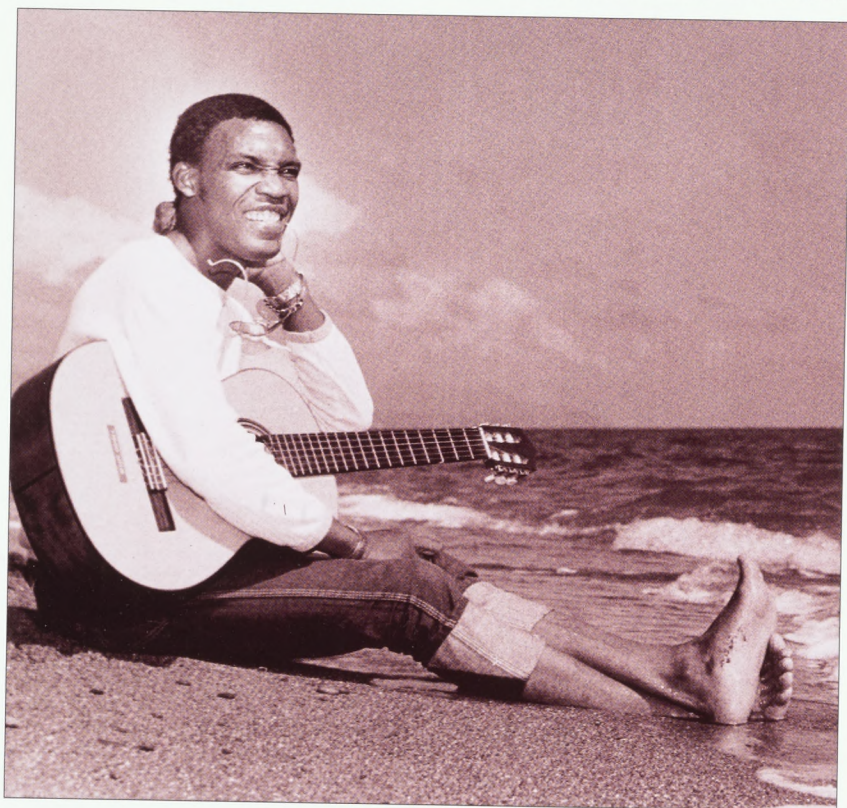
As the months passed, I realized I was not alone in my newfound discovery. Marley was becoming the darling of American rock critics, though reggae was struggling to be heard outside a cult audience. Marley toured America in 1975 for the first time as a solo act – the original Wailers had separated



along career and spiritual lines – and his appearance at L.A.'s Roxy was the hottest ticket of the year, with music-biz heavies and Hollywood stars vying for entry. George Harrison, Mick Jagger, Ringo Starr and Jack Nicholson ended up on tabletops, cheering what tour MC Tony G called the "Trench Town Experience."

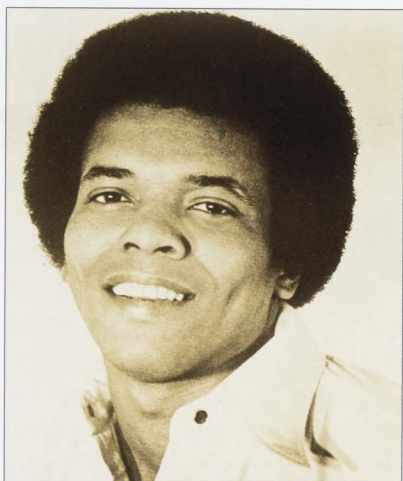
To understand the full effect of reggae's bottom-rich riddims, to put a face on the music, one had to experience it live. A hastily arranged show on the same tour at Oakland's Paramount Theater offered my first chance to see Marley in action. It was staged by Bill Graham, and the place had virtually sold out by word of mouth. We sat in the

Above: Jimmy Cliff (wearing white) and his band in the mid-1970s, around the time Cliff scored the international hits "Struggling Man" and "House of Exile"; Below: Desmond Dekker, in Jamaica, ca. 1969, just after "The Israelites" soared to Number Nine in America





Above: Solo artist and political activist Peter Tosh (who left the Wailers in 1973), several years before his September 1987 murder in Jamaica; Below: Johnny Nash, ca. 1972; Opposite: International ambassador of reggae Robert Nesta Marley



front row of the balcony, leaning over the rail as Marley took the stage. Although his locks barely grazed his shoulders at the time, his appearance seemed so bizarre, so unearthly, that many folks around us gasped at the sight of him. He wore street clothes and sang with his eyes closed, trancelike, and the mesmerizing Marley never said a word between tunes. During instrumental solos, he would snap his head back as if he were about to fall over, then flail his body forward as his dreadlocks whipped around his face, making him appear like some Upper Niger fetish mask come to life. Every time he did this, the audience would rise to its feet with a leonine roar. Frenzied cheers rent the air when he delivered the street-fighter lines of "Talkin' Blues": "I feel like bombin' a church/Now that you know that the preacher is lying/So who's gonna stay at home/When the freedom fighters are fighting?" This was something other than "boogie till your coke spoon falls off your neck" music - it was as soulful and meaningful and un-Seventies glam as one could get in the mid-Seventies.

None of our growing number of reggae-listening brethren could have known it at the time, but 1976 was to prove a banner year for Jah music. It was a high-water mark - not just because Marley had a hit and was on the cover of the most important music magazines but because now everybody was paying attention. The major labels went scurrying to find the next dreadlocked shaman. Check the now-timeless titles that came forward alongside *Rastaman Vibration* in that twelve-month span: Peter Tosh's anthem to the herb, *Legalize It*; Bunny Wailer's powerful debut, *Blackheart Man*; Toots and the Maytals' R&B-infused *Reggae Got Soul*; Burning Spear's singles collection, *Marcus Garvey* (and its dub, sepulchral sister *Garvey's Ghost*); and the Lee "Scratch" Perry-produced singles, Max Romeo's call to arms, "War in Babylon," and Junior Murvin's punk-inspiring "Police and Thieves" (a U.K. pop hit), later covered by the Clash. For sheer creativity and clear-eyed vision, the leading voices of reggae have never packed it so forcefully, same time, same place.

As 1976 ran out, the harsh and bitter realities brewing under Jamaica's idyllic island unity almost robbed us of its most effective ambassador. Bob Marley was wounded in a politically motivated assassination attempt, ironically echoing the biblical words he had quoted on the cover of his hit album: "The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him."

The next year, Marley was in exile in England, teaming up with Perry to produce the raucous twelve-inch single "Punky Reggae Party." "The Wailers will be there," he sang. "The Damned, the Jam, the Clash, Dr. Feelgood, too." The solidarity and influence between dreads and Mohawks was blessed, and reggae began to overtake other musical styles. The Clash's "(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais" and Elvis Costello's "Watching the Detectives" adapted skank rhythms to a fiercer, punk-based attack, foretelling the first full-force ska revival to come in 1979-80 with two-tone bands like the Selecter, the English Beat, Madness and later the Police, UB40, Men at Work and on. And on. And on.

Now, more than a quarter century later, the sound of roots reggae has become so familiar as to be old hat. It has been successfully diffused through other musical styles (rap, untold ska permutations), while mutating and updating itself (dub, dancehall, ambient Bob Marley?). On a level more widespread than almost any music since jazz, reggae's riddims and message of uprising have spread from a small Caribbean island to become a global, musical Esperanto uniting peoples, countries and struggles. One can find roots-type bands singing "One Love" in Portuguese in Brazil, in Zulu in South Africa, in Fijian in the South Pacific. Among black and brown cultures, Marley has been elevated to a Che Guevara stature, as revered for his political stance as for his creative vision. Stranger transformations have occurred. As *New York Times* critic Jon Pareles predicts, "In 2096, when the former third world has overrun and colonized the former superpowers, Bob Marley will be commemorated as a saint." ●

