



CHOKOTA, Ujamaa
Produced by Mark Carmody and Ujamaa
Record Review by Veda Bowlin

Chokota is the debut album, released in December 1991, by local reggae band Ujamaa. All of the music and lyrics in the collection are original and represent the best of the band's compositions. (With any luck, we won't have to wait too long for more).

As should be well known, Ujamaa is the only reggae band in Fredericton, maybe even in the province; the band was created through an amalgamation of two small reggae groups, Small Axe and Sons of Gilbert, thus the name "Ujamaa," a Swahili word for "togetherness." Kwame Dawes, the Jamaican lead singer, had been lead vocalist in both bands, and proved to be the catalyst in the union. Other members are rhythm guitarist Luis Cardoso, keyboard player and backing vocalist Lisa Wilby, drummer Dave Bartlett, key-board and sax player Mike Doherty, bass player Chris Hunt, and lead guitar player Geordie Haley, who stepped into Peter Hick's shoes when Hicks left the scene. Hicks had been involved in the composition and recording of the music which is featured on Chokota.

Ujamaa has a wide and impressive repertoire of original material, and having heard them several times in Fredericton, I realize that they rarely do covers; not even of reggae greats such as Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Burning Spear, and the like. The band is able to utilize their own music to sustain a full night's performance. Ujamaa has performed extensively in Fredericton: the Social Club, Trina's, Sweetwaters, the Loading Dock, and the Cosmo

have all been venues for the band's performances. They have also performed in Moncton and Saint John, and have recently made their fourth appearance at Atlantic Canada's premiere showcase club, Halifax's Flamingo Cafe and Lounge.

Last Thursday I left campus early with the intention of going home to write an overdue philosophy essay; however, I made the mistake of putting on the Ujamaa cassette. Can you guess what happened? No essay was written -- instead I spent the evening dancing and singing along with the tape and replaying it more times than I care to remember. The tunes are irresistible! They make you want to get up and dance. Anyone who has been to a performance by Ujamaa will know what I mean. Their music is so forceful and compelling that the dance floor is always full. That same quality has been captured in their recorded music.

Throughout the entire album one notices that the message of advocacy, struggle, and political awareness forms a thread linking the songs. This is an important feature of reggae music in general and serves to make Ujamaa's music authentic. The title track, *Chokota*, has strong parallels with the roots reggae music of Burning Spear. The haunting lyrics are evocative of Africa's history and her people's struggles for survival. *Chokota* was composed by Kwame Dawes; like many of his other compositions, it demonstrates that he writes from a first-hand experience as an African-Jamaican who has studied the situation of the African people, both at home and abroad, through history and literature.

I Shot John Wayne is a controversial track. It is a tribute to Canada's Native

people and their struggle to regain rights which have been eroded throughout the years. It speaks of the events during the Oka crisis which led to the shooting of a police officer. The sax playing is compellingly beautiful; my only regret is that there wasn't more of it. If Mike Doherty does everything else as well as he plays the saxophone, I'm sure he's blowing a lot of minds out there. The song is ironic in its allusion to the stereotypical cowboy star, who in old westerns always massacred the Indians but could never himself be killed. It celebrates the importance of Native heritage and regrets the necessity of the killing at Oka. Lisa Wilby's music provides the vehicle for Dawes lyric on this piece.

Leave us the Sky is indicative of the majority of reggae music. A very thought-provoking lament, and beautiful from first note to its last dying chord, it hits out against those corporations bent on raping the earth with no regard for the scars and damage wrought on the environment (*"You have taken the earth/ You have taken the sea/ The seed is in the soil but the seed won't grow"*). The track is done in the slow chanting style known as "dub poetry," and Hick's prominent lead guitar work on this track is simply incredible.

One of my observations is that several of the tracks carry a common theme; for example, *Paradise Wasted*, *Mr. Lazarus*, and *Burdens* all evoke the existing reality of the world situation, that is, rich and poor nations, thief and beggar nations. *Mr. Lazarus* lashes out at the manipulations of politicians and capitalists which result in oppressive systems for the majority of people in the world. There is a harmonious blending of bass, saxophone, and keyboards which makes the track a joy to listen to. Lisa Wilby also provides some good clear contrasting backing vocals for Dawes' strong, rich voice. This theme continues in *Paradise Wasted* (*"Mothers weeping, hungry babies moan... They can't suck milk from stone... People*

are dying in this wasted land of dreams"). In the manner of the reggae genre known worldwide as "message music," the stark lines highlight the plight of the suffering in poor nations.

Burdens is one of the anchoring songs of Chokota, and denotes anger, passion, and pain while exploring political violence against Black people and hinting at possible vengeful retaliation. Strong message indeed! It is because of this type of song that reggae is still not liked by the political establishment in Jamaica.

Crucial Situation is an emotionally charged song. Written by Luis Cardoso, it is the album's only love song. *Crucial Situation* is in the tradition of reggae popularly known as lover's rock. The comparison is made between a romance and a hazardous sea voyage; it points to the turbulent and stormy nature of many love relationships. The song ends with some DJ chanting reminiscent of the grand-daddy of DJ's, U-Roy, and others such as Big Youth, whose musical style was later copied and modified by rap artists in North America.

Version World and *Bird in the Hand* are philosophical in nature, more so than any other tracks on the album. You may interpret them any which way you please. *Bird in the Hand* is a mixture of melodic vocals and rhythmic syncopations, highlighting a duel between the jazzy guitar and saxophone lines. I found this track intriguing and perplexing: I was at a loss as to its meaning, but what the heck! There is no law which states that one must always understand musicians. The important thing is to enjoy what they do. Both tracks demonstrate the complexity of Cardoso's talent as composer.

Version World is equally interesting and thought-provoking. In Jamaican dialect "version" refers to a musical track which has had the vocals removed, leaving only the drum and the bass line. It is very stark and compelling, and the type of music that those innovators of DJ music would chant their lyrics against. In *Version World*, Ujamaa sings of the false contrived situation in many repressive societies which create oppression and degradation for many (*"Alpha say apartheid is Nazi-system/ Mix down voices with whips and brutality/Wash out sounds with the blood of the people"*). A comparison is drawn between the system of apartheid in South Africa and the treatment of music in studios to create a "version." Again, one cannot help but notice

Cardoso's cleverness. This is not your "run-of-the-mill" stuff. It is haunting and makes one not only appreciate the music for its dance quality but for its serious theme.

I found *Rain*, another one of Cardoso's compositions, to be the most infectious, danceable tune of the recording. It simply invites one to have fun and I know that many people will find it irresistible. In *Rain* one sees the symbolic cleansing power and purity of rain even amid trepidation of its awesome power. For sheer enjoyment I think this is the number one track of the recording.

Overall the music on Chokota is poetic and riveting, especially where it concerns unpleasant themes such as violence, oppression, apartheid, and poverty. This is the epitome of "real" reggae, which I am sure will help to stir people's consciousness. I'm no musicologist or any other expert in the field, but I really think this recording should bring Ujamaa the wide exposure they deserve; and who knows, I may soon just have the pleasure of seeing the Ujies perform at the famous Reggae Sunsplash festival in Jamaica. So to all you funky reggae people out there: get a copy of Chokota -- it's rlie!

*Days run out for me,
Life goes from bad to worse,
Very soon, very much soon,
Time will lead me to the end.
Very well. So be it.
But one thing I beg of you.
If the sun must set for me,
If all must come to an end,
If you must be rid of me,
The way you have done with
all my friends,
If you must kill me,
Do so fast.
KILL ME QUICK
-Meja Mwangi*

PIZZA TWICE

MID-WINTER
SINGLE
FEAST
CELEBRATION

ONE
12" Pizza
ANY
2 Toppings.

ONE
9" Garlic
Cheese
Fingers.

ONLY \$9.99

{All Taxes Included!}

Offer Expires February 23/92
{We Reserve Right To Limit Quantities!}

Pick Up & Delivery

403 Regent St. 245 Main St.
457-9292 453-0099

A&A

AMA MUSIC AND ENTERTAINMENT INC.
If you love it, A&A's got it!

C.C. Peneston	7.88	14.88
- Finally		
Black Sheep	8.88	15.88
- Sheep In Wolf Clothing		
"Juice"	8.88	15.88
- Soundtrack		
Bootsauce	8.88	15.88
- Bull		
Mr. Big	8.88	15.88
- Lean In To It		
"Rush"	8.88	15.88
- Soundtrack		

Wednesday
IS
Student
Appreciation Day

10% Off

Must present valid Student I.D.
At all Fredericton & Oromocto
A & A Locations.

Now Open
2nd Location

NORGE

CLEANERS AND LAUNDROMAT
"The EXTRA Care Cleaners"
Since 1962

Full Laundromat Featuring:

- Maytag Washers
- 35 lb & 50 lb Oversized Washers (for extra-big loads - SAVE Time & Money)
- Large Work Tables For Folding & Sorting
- Drop Off Laundry Service
- Reading & Study Area
- Large Size Dryers
- Attendant On Duty
- Alterations
- Colour Cable T.V.
- Air Conditioned
- Ample Parking

• Professional Dry Cleaning On Site
{Specializing in Fine Fabrics & Bridal Wear}

OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK
458-5535
New Location
Minutes from U.N.B. & S.T.U.
at Beaverbrook Court
Come In & Visit Our Modern Facility Today
"You're Assured The Finest"
Also at 191 Main Street (North) 472-6551