

Redefining reggae

Dish of Sattalites

by Roy MacLaren

By the end of their Saturday night gig at Pub Flamingo, the Sattalites had everybody out on the dance floor a movin' and groovin' to the Toronto band's particular blend of reggae and pop. What could be a better indicator of a band's success?

Led by 48-year-old Jamaican expatriate Jo Jo Bennett on flugelhorn (a mellow-sounding trumpet) and Fergus Hambleton on sax and lead vocals, the eight-member band combines a warm stage presence with a tightly knit, up-beat sound.

Besides complementing each other musically, Bennett and Hambleton's stage personalities mesh perfectly, adding to the friendly atmosphere of the gig. Bennett, who has worked with reggae greats such as Bob Marley and Peter Tosh, bounces around stage beating his cow horn, mimicking other members of the band, and generally urging the crowd to become more involved while Hambleton plays a straighter, more subdued role.

On their fourth swing through the maritimes, the Sattalites played before sold-out crowds at Saint Francis Xavier, Mount Allison, and Dal's SuperSUB, where they were cut short when vandals

pulled a fire alarm. They finished up their Eastern mini-tour at the Pub Flamingo from Tuesday to Saturday of last week.

The band is now working on its third album, after its 1985 debut *The Sattalites* and 1987 *Live Via Sattalites*, and has released a record in Australia. "We'd like to capture a major recording contract," says keyboardist David Fowler, "but if we don't we'll just keep on recording with our little independent label. The important thing is to keep progressing." The new album is expected to be finished by January.

"We've developed our own unique sound," says co-leader Hambleton of the Sattalites' reggae-pop blend. "It's also 1988. It's a different time," he adds, referring to comparisons with earlier forms of reggae.

"We're a musical mix-up," says the veteran Bennett. "We've got Canadian, American, Jamaican, Chinese, rock, classical, jazz, everything."

The Sattalites have no problems as a racially mixed, Canadian-based band playing what is generally considered a black, Jamaican style of music. "Really, it's all just music," Hambleton says. "I was a little apprehensive before (we went to

Jamaica) but once I got there everyone was so accepting it went over really well."

"There are always purists with a very narrow definition of what (reggae) should be," says Jamaican-born rhythm guitarist and vocalist Neville Francis. "I personally see no reason that it should not be played well in Canada. Really, reggae has become an international force, more so than anyone would have thought five years ago."

"If you're a purist you're simply going to copy the way other people play it," agrees Fowler. "I'm trying to be true to my surroundings. Obviously the Canadian influence affects the final outcome. I see no problem with that."

"We've found a really strong core support in Edmonton, which seems unlikely," Fowler continued. "But every time we go there we pack the place."

"We're on a type of campaign to open people's eyes to other types of music. The most consistent comment I've heard from people is, 'I've never liked reggae before but now that I've heard you guys I like it.'"

Fowler predicts that "North American crowds will eventually think of reggae as soul dance music."



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