

ARTS

Roots, reggae and resistance

NADIRA ALLY

Reggae protest formed out of suffering. You vibrate it back to those who oppress you.

(Rodriguez, Jamaican trombonist)

REGGAE IS AN expression of resistance. It is a social phenomenon created by one of the dreadful diasporas of history — the slave trade. Millions of Africans were uprooted and dispersed throughout the Caribbean, U.S. and Latin America. They were de-culturized,

de-humanized and de-named.

The struggle for identity was manifested primarily through music - drumming, work songs and digging tunes. Drumming was also used as a signal of rebellion and as such instilled fear into plantation owners.

Drumming was therefore forbidden, as were many things, but the slaves resorted to secrecy and disguise in order to keep their beliefs and customs alive in them. It was a way of fighting back. African music was communal and drums kept alive the memory of freedom they had lost.

Reggae music grew out of this expression of resentment, anger and frustration. These were the roots of reggae which soon evolved into the original folk form of Mento which helped workers survive long hours.

During the '50s Mento began to evolve into Ska, and Rock Steady into Reggae between 1968 and 1972. Blues reflected the consciousness of oppression; Calypso used cynic, satire and laughter as a weapon; but reggae was by far the most revolutionary. It was a re-

flection of the dilemma of identity. In Peter Tosh's song 'Equal Rights', he exclaims; Everybody striving to reach the top, But how far is it from the bottom? Everyone is crying out for peace, None is crying out for justice.

Himself a Rastafarian, Bob Marley's influence has been tremendous and continues to be the life line of reggae music. However, it will mark a decade on May 11 this year that Bob Marley has died; but he will not be forgotten as his music that brought hope and



Don't care where you come from, As long as you're a black man, You're an African.

No matter your nationality, You've got the identity of an African.

The issue of black pride and black identity is for a large part due to the Rastafarian culture. Rastafarianism is the strongest form of protest culture, one which seeks to instill pride in our Africaness.

Marcus Mosiah Garvey, a Jamaican prophet, helped pave the way for the Rastas in an aim to bring all black people together, to encourage them to be proud of their race and culture. The Rastas have influenced Reggae music with their style and their red, green and gold colours symbolize the Ethiopian colours for Africa and His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie.

We cannot forget to mention the great influence of the late Great Honorable Robert Nesta Marley — the producer of ghetto music. From his rhythms come the powerful messages about poverty, inequality and black identity.

identity still lives.

The strong African root of the rhythm is missing now due to cultural destruction, but is still the central instrument in West Africa. However, percussion instruments like the bell, the scraper and clappers are an important feature of reggae music, and we cannot forget its throbbing heartbeat - the bass guitar. On the surface reggae music sounds light and carefree, but underneath it is the sound of rebellion seeking freedom and revenge.

Black History month will end on the 28th with a thundering of music by black influences with many notable black deejays from Dal and SMU. It is also our intent to hold a memorial celebration around the time of the anniversary of Bob's death. Black music can be heard on CKDU 97.5 FM, simply pick up a program guide and check it out!

We're the Survivors,
Yes the Black Survivors!
(from Bob Marley's song 'Survival')

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