



PHOTO BY KIM SALLAWAY

Stephen Marley on stage at *Reggae on the River*, 2006.

Stephen Marley and Junior Gong: *Mind Control* Tour (Seattle, April 13)

From his stage presence, you would never have guessed Stephen Marley was promoting his debut album. From the opening song—a cover of “Reggae on Broadway”—to the final encore—a cover of “Exodus,” where he was joined by Damian “Junior Gong” Marley and rapper K’naan—Stephen Marley ruled the stage and kept the crowd in a frenzy, interspersed with the covers of his father’s songs, he even managed to sing most of his songs from *Mind Control*. Of these, “Hey Baby” and his duo with Junior Gong, “The Traffic Jam,” were the best. Damian also tore down the house with “Welcome to Jamrock.” So even if Stephen Marley did lean a little too much on his father’s material—he sounds incredibly like Bob Marley and the crowd certainly enjoyed it—he put on a great show, well worth the price of admission. [Thank you to Zion’s Gate Records for making this review possible, after an army of Marley publicists failed. Check out www.zionsgate.com for a deep selection of new and used reggae and dancehall on vinyl and cd.] —RR

MUSICAL MURDER

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Borderline Riddim (Irie Ites)

This cd boasts an all-star roots lineup for an uptempo steppers riddim from Mafia and Fluxy. The riddim has an urgent and almost overwhelming feel propelled by the opening trombone line. Top songs include Luciano’s “Hammer,” Jah Mason’s “You Wanna Go” and Perfect’s “Are You Sure.” The cd is rounded off nicely by Guyana artist Ras McBean, who goes solo in the riddim namesake, and has a nice duo with Anthony B, “Wake Up Call.” —RR

Chuck Fenda, *The Living Fire* (Greensleeves)

This cd is worth the price for the opening track alone. “Gash Dem,” which lived on the Jamaican charts for much of 2006, was initially banned on Jamaican airwaves because of its call to violence—granted it was a call to violence against gangsters and “badman,” but a call to violence nonetheless. The ban only fueled the frenzy in the dancehall to deafening “forwards.” Once the ban was lifted, the rest was history, as we say. This story became the material for track 3, “Freedom of Speech.”

Fenda is an interesting character because even though he embraced Rastafari in 2000 and is adept at

conscious tunes, I can see him dedicating the rest of his career to girl tunes and being very proficient at it—but I digress. In reality, he’s dedicated his career to those less fortunate as his moniker “The Poor People’s Defender” has stuck. In his liner notes he thanks “all the poor, needy and less fortunate worldwide. Chuck Fenda will always be by your side bringing out your cry.” It’s moving.

The quality of this cd spans from brilliantly shining to repetitively grating. Gems like “Gash Dem,” “Coming Over” featuring Cherine Anderson, and “Long Road” are Fenda at his best—it’s obvious the music comes from his heart. “Change Your Ways” also has a really nice chorus but we hear it a few too many times. Tanya Stephens redeems “Child of the Universe” with her smooth, lyrical lines complementing Fenda’s unpolished style.

I have two criticisms of this cd. The biggest one is how absolutely repetitive Fenda’s songs are. He has great melodies yet there’s a stagnant feel to them around two minutes in. The second issue is his pitch. I know

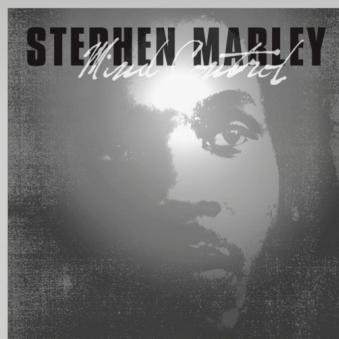
STEPHEN MARLEY

MIND CONTROL

(Universal Republic/Tuff Gong
B0008354-02, 2007)

Bob Marley’s second son, Stephen, has finally come out from behind the production boards with an impressive debut solo album. Stephen, who has spent much of his musical career producing other artists like his brothers Ziggy and Damian as well as big-named artists like Eve, Erykah Badu and fellow countryman Buju Banton, has been a unifying force in his family’s musical legacy. As part of Ziggy’s Melody Makers, as well as a key player in Damian’s production team, he has earned himself five Grammy Awards—more than any other reggae artist in history.

Because of Damian’s success



with *Welcome to Jamrock*, this album was held back so the two would not compete. The cd was initially set for a June 7, 2005 release as *Got Music?* and featuring “Mind Control” as the would-be first single.

There’s something very earthy about this album—the lulling one-drop rhythms, combined with biting political commentary, and the day-to-day reality of relationships. A *Kaya* meets *Confrontation* of sorts. But I would be amiss if I only made

the parallels to his father’s music. This is Stephen’s voice, Stephen’s reality and Stephen’s testament. “My joy and my pain, this is me,” says Stephen. “It’s a page from my book: every page tells a story, but at the same time is a continuation of the page before it or the page to come. This is just one page.”

With guests Mos Def, Ben Harper and his brothers Damian and Julian, among others, the gritty sound is updated for the 21st century—marked with dj riffs, Latin flavor and current slang. But overall the themes are universal: Loneliness, *I live on a lonely avenue/ my little girl won’t say ‘I do’/ so I try, I try, I try/ yes, I cry, I cry, I cry*” in “*Lonely Avenue*; the need for autonomy, *I’m the judge, the lawyer, jury/ I am my own bails-man/ And if you check it good/ A goodly my station* in “*Traffic Jam*”; freedom of thought, “Don’t let them mold your mind, they wanna control mankind”

in “*Mind Control*,” which is an updated version of Bob Marley’s “*Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but yourself can free your mind*.” Heartache takes center stage on “*You’re Gonna Leave*,” and “*Fed Up*,” the latter a personal story of a woman fed up with the musician’s lifestyle—he’s coming home late, she’s feeling mistreated and doesn’t like his “*silly games*.”

The universality of this cd really captures what reggae is all about—reality, rebellion, unity and introspection. Thirty-four years in the making, this cd reflects Stephen’s place in life where he knows himself, has children to school, and has already established himself in the production realm. With Damian’s two incredible albums and now this cd, I am confident that Bob Marley’s legacy has a fighting chance. —LG