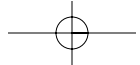


LUCKY DOUBE

RASTAS NEVER DIE
BY RANDALL GRASS



On the morning of Oct. 19, 2007, there was stunning news: Lucky Dube, a monumental figure in world music, had been murdered the previous day, the victim of an attempted carjacking as he was dropping two of his children off at his brother's home in Rosettenville, a town south of Johannesburg, South Africa. He was survived by his wife and seven children.

If one measure of a man's impact on the world is the breadth and intensity of reaction to his death, then clearly Lucky Dube touched millions around the world. The news traveled fast and the reaction to it was similar everywhere: disbelief and a profound sense of loss. I was reminded very much of the reaction when Lucky's hero Peter Tosh had died, ironically also the victim of a senseless murder connected with a robbery. It also seemed very telling that Lucky had been killed in the act of taking his children somewhere because Lucky was a devoted father who wanted very much for his children to have the benefit of a committed father and stable family— things he had never had as a child. While the world knows of Lucky's greatness as a musical artist, it was mainly those who came into personal contact with him who knew of his greatness as a person.

Lucky Dube was born on Aug. 3, 1964 on a small farm outside the town of Ermelo, roughly 90 miles from Johannesburg. His early life was marked by extreme poverty; his parents had separated before he was born. He started working from the age of five in order to contribute to his family's needs and was unable to start his schooling until several years later. Often working in the yards of white families, Lucky experienced many of the humiliations and hardships that apartheid visited on black people. More than once as a boy he had dogs set upon him by white people for sport. These incidents are vividly recounted in Guy Henderson's biography of him, *Crazy World*. Despite the racism that he experienced and the anger he felt, Lucky never lapsed into bitterness and always espoused the need for people of all races to come together, a sentiment memorialized in his anthem "Together As One." A good student despite his late start, in school he discovered music and despite his mother's desire that he aspire to a profession, he was determined to become a musician.

In 1982, at the age of 18, Lucky and his cousin Richard Siluma formed their first band called the Love Brothers, which played mainly *mbaqanga* music. Their first album, produced by Richard, was released as by Lucky Dube and the Supersoul in deference to Lucky's powerful lead vocals. The group began to experience success, with Lucky starting to write more of the material, and for the first time in his life Lucky began to experience a bit of financial stability. He and Richard noticed that whenever they did a reggae number they got great reaction from the audience. Lucky had been listening to a lot of reggae, inspired particularly by Bob Marley and Peter Tosh, and found that the message carried by reggae lyrics in the context of accessible music was the perfect medium for him to address the political situation in South Africa. Characteristically, he chose to follow his convictions rather than continue on the safe, successful track he had been following with *mbaqanga*.

Lucky's first all-reggae album, *Rastas Never Die*, was banned by the South Africa government and did not do well. His record company wanted him to return to *mbaqanga* but Lucky and Richard on the sly produced another reggae album, *Think About the Children*, which became a massive hit. By this time, Lucky's explosive live performances, which often lasted many hours and featured his spectacular dancing as well as singing, had made him a top concert draw. He then recorded another album, *Slave*, led by the massive hit title track which portrayed the evils of alcoholism, something he had witnessed in his own family. A string of best-selling albums followed.

It was in 1986 that I first heard Lucky Dube's music. Late at night in the warehouse of Shanachie Records, we listened to his *Slave* album, which had been sent from South Africa. At a time when dancehall styles had superseded classic roots reggae, it was startling to hear such powerful and profound roots reggae from an African artist. As a result, Shanachie released *Slave* as Lucky's American debut and when he came on tour, his conquest of America began in earnest. A series of classic albums followed, among them *Prisoner*, *Victim* and *House of Exile*, all filled with unflinching social commentary including one song, "Prisoner," which contained the prophetic lines: "they won't build no schools anymore...all they'll build will be prisons, prisons."

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ISLAND REGGAE

Legends Of Reggae

1978 ★
Third World
JOURNEY TO ADDIS

Caribbean musicianship reaches the premier league. Rock, reggae, R&B, funk & disco fuse and reach the diaspora. "Now That We Found Love," "Journey To Addis," "African Woman," "One Cold Vibe (couldn't stop dis ya boogie)."

★ **1980**
Toots & The Maytals
LIVE

TOOTS LIVE
AND THE MAYTALS

Big fun in the Palais. A kinetic show caught live and issued on record the very next day in London. Expanded with bonus tracks: "Pressure Drop," "Sweet & Dandy," "54-46 Was My Number," "Funky Kingston," "Reggae Got Soul."

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THE PRIDE OF THE GARIFUNA

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her mournful voice filled with pain and longing. “Uruwei” is a drowsy, bluesy vamp with a dreamy slide guitar. Bernadine Flores sings a song composed by her grandmother as low voices murmur, overlap and sleep-walk down the hall. Ivan added in the sound of a hammock rocking to gentle waves to enhance the intimate ambience.

Thrice exiled, the Garinagu have traveled a long hard road, wrenched from Africa into alien lands filled with perils and forces beyond their control. Their resilience, toughness and will to survive underscores all aspects of their culture and lifestyle, and as Miss Sofia pointed out, women are not considered an inferior, weaker sex, but full and essential partners in the everyday struggle for existence. These substantial women are every bit as hardy—and talented—as the menfolk.

The *Umalali* album will be released in March. In view of the tragic demise of Andy Palacio, at press time plans for the extensive 2008 tour by the Garifuna Collective are not complete, but it will go on and the performances will be dedicated to Andy’s memory and legacy. Some of the *Umalali* singers will accompany the Collective on tour dates as special guests on a rotating basis, and there are plans to create a *Umalali* performing ensemble for a 2009 tour. ★

LUCKY DUBE: RASTAS NEVER DIE

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I first met Lucky at a sound check at a concert venue in Philadelphia. When I came into the theater looking for him, I noticed someone sitting alone on the empty stage, his hands clasped around his knees. Coming closer, I saw that it was Lucky. He was simply waiting, in his unassuming way, for the technical people to get things together. He never moved with a large entourage and was not one to demand special treatment. Through all the years of grueling U.S. tours, I never heard a word of complaint from him, other than his feeling that certain venues were not large enough. But of course he was used to playing stadiums in Africa. Whatever promotional work needed to be done, Lucky did his part with no hassles. That night at the show, he demonstrated the performing prowess that had made him a star in Africa. Playing “only” a two-hour show (as compared to his lengthier African concerts), he and his full band, replete with horn section and I Three-like trio of female vocalists, delivered a tight but never slick set highlighted by Lucky’s deeply felt vocals and by the singing and dancing of his chorus. Special highlights came when Lucky’s robust baritone, delivered with the laconic phrasing that was so reminiscent of Peter Tosh, would suddenly take flight in a stunning falsetto. Lucky’s sound, though based on the classic reggae sound, always had elements of South African music, such as the distinctive organ sounds that were reminiscent of mbaqanga or the Zulu dancing performed by Lucky and the women. It was important to Lucky to maintain his South African identity. Interestingly, Lucky became one of the few non-Jamaican reggae artists to be embraced by Jamaicans, who traditionally had been less than impressed by U.K. and American reggae artists. Indeed he was extremely popular throughout the entire Caribbean.

Lucky’s political views, while always strong, never followed any party line. His song “Women,” for instance, stirred controversy internationally with its straightforward depiction of women as subordinate to men. Lucky was met with protests from women’s groups in the U.S. but he never backed away from the song. It may have been that the song was meant to depict, rather than endorse, a disturbing reality but he did not attempt to rationalize it. In his life, though, Lucky’s attitude toward and treatment of women was exemplary and he was quick to take men to task for mistreating women. Lucky was not one to court controversy or to speak in inflammatory terms but his convictions were penetrating. His way was to simply state his viewpoint; he would listen to other viewpoints but generally he held his position.

Other aspects of Lucky little-seen by the general public come to mind. He had a dry sense of humor and took delight during casual conversation in making shocking statements with a deadpan expression; if his listener reacted, he just smiled. He could laugh at himself as well. When Gallo Records, his South African label, made a deal with Motown’s Tabu Records for his *Trinity* album after several releases by Shanachie in America, he told an interviewer that he would see what the major label could do for him

and if it didn’t work he’d “come back to Shanachie with his tail between his legs.” He needn’t have worried; when the *Trinity* album did not break big and Motown did not wish to continue with him, we were thrilled to have him back. He also loved horror films and had acting ambitions.

The last time I saw Lucky, after a show (spectacular as usual!), we chatted about life in general. We compared notes on the challenges of raising teenaged daughters and I was struck by his deep concern for his eldest daughter who was undergoing a rocky emergence from adolescence. Clearly he was deeply involved in insuring her well-being, despite his relentless international touring schedule. During the past 20 years, there was no other reggae artist who was more widely popular across the globe. The small country boy had grown up to conquer the world on his own terms. I believe that in the last horrific moments of his life, Lucky had refused to give up; he had after all, stared down the gun barrels of apartheid as a youth. Even after he was shot, he was able to drive his car away from his attackers until he lost consciousness and crashed. We are left with his magnificent music as well as our memories and the lingering question he posed in his song “War and Crime”

We know where we come from

We don’t know where we’re going

Why don’t we bury apartheid...

Fight down war and crime? ★

LAST VISIT WITH LUCKY DUBE

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Q: Excellent. And you always had one of the greatest female backing vocal groups back then too, I can remember seeing you live many times at the Music Machine and a lot of other places and what a full, full sound you always have on stage.

A: It’s very nice to have that, even with times when we were still doing mbaqanga we used to have that, we used to have even a bigger band then but we’ve always had the female singers and stuff, it’s just great to have that, the big band, the full band, very good.

Q: Yes, a fullness.

A: It feels nice on stage, it helps us sing better maybe!

Q: Coming from South Africa at the time you came out, your music was revolutionary in more senses than one. I’m just wondering, what’s it like for you now in South Africa?

A: Well, there’s a song on that album *Respect*, it’s called “Monster.” It says “One monster dies and another one comes alive.” Even though in the past we had that apartheid monster that died, but there is some other monsters that came up now which we still have to fight. ‘Cause even though we change the books in South Africa, we didn’t change the peoples’ minds. So now that is the next thing that we have to deal with: the people’s minds now.

Q: Yeah well, isn’t that the way of the world.

A: That’s the way it is! [Laughs].

Q: Another song I really like off the new album is the one called “Mask,” and this is kind of a personal song isn’t it?

A: Well it is in a way because as artists, as musicians we have to be actors as well. Because there’s a lot of things that go on, maybe even before a show but when we go on stage it’s all smiles. It’s like you put on a mask that nobody sees what’s behind you and the whole thing but that’s kind of like with every celebrity I think. We all have masks, the masks that people put on and I’ve heard of people who stay in relationships, people who stay married even if they’re not happy but because it looks good to the outside world or maybe because they have to be seen with that person and they will have to put on a mask to get into that character.

Q: You bring up an interesting point because the fact is in a lot of your music over the years you’ve talked about things like divorce and separation from your children—whether these are circumstances of your own that you’re talking about or universal situations you’re voicing, it’s unusual for an artist to be so honest in his music.

A: The thing is with music I cannot lie in music. Maybe that’s the reason why I don’t have a lot of love songs where you have to have like “Oh, baby

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