



# *Last Visit With* **LUCKY DUBE**

*By Chuck Foster*

PHOTO BY LEE ABEL

*Do you ever worry about having your car taken away in broad daylight?*

*—Lucky Dube, "Crime and Corruption"*

Throughout his life and in his stellar musical career Lucky Dube addressed the very thing that killed him—in songs like "Guns and Roses," "Victims," "Crazy World," "Cool Down," "My Brother, My Enemy," "Til You Lose It All" and "Together As One."

Just as he sang of the issues of apartheid, race and politics, he spoke out against crime and violence on a global and a local level. I first interviewed Lucky Dube back in the early '90s when I was writing for the now-defunct *L.A. View*. That interview, with updates and discography, appeared in my book *Roots Rock Reggae*, published in 1999. That same year Lucky Dube issued *The Way It Is* (Shanachie), with standout tracks like "Man in the City," "Crime and Corruption" and "You Stand Alone." A "best of" called *The Rough Guide to Lucky Dube* (World Music Network) gathered cuts from earlier releases in 2001; the following year *Soul Taker* (Shanachie) included standout tracks "Put A Little Love," "Teach the World" and the contemplative "Is This Freedom." Tours and festivals continued and 2007's *Respect* (Gallo) brought great new songs.

On Sept. 9, 2007 Lucky Dube dropped in for a visit on "Reggae Central" on KPFK-FM in L.A., a little over a month before his tragic death. I asked my associate producer, Justine Ketola, to drape the back wall with a Lucky Dube Fan Club flag I'd held onto for many years for just such an occasion. He stopped still when he saw the red, green and gold banner emblazoned with his face. "I've had that a long time," I said. "A long time," he agreed. The following is a verbatim transcription of my last visit with roots giant Lucky Dube as we talked about music and life. In between I played tracks from the new album, from which I have extracted a few quotes.

38 THE BEAT VOL. 27 #1, 2008



PHOTO BY CHUCK FOSTER



*We're living in the world with a lot of crazy people  
We're living in a world with a lot of psychopaths.  
Everyone of them wants to rule the world...  
It is a give or take world.  
So you gotta take what you can when you can,  
Make the best of it....  
Some people don't know what life is worth.  
Some people have the front row seats at the gates of Hell.  
You could have problems now  
But there's no problem worth your life.*

—Lucky Dube, “Celebrate Life”

**Chuck Foster:** Welcome to “Reggae Central.”

**Lucky Dube:** Hey, how ya' doin. Yes, yes.

**Q:** Great to have you in town.

**A:** Very nice to be back, man. It's been a long time.

**Q:** We're looking through some Lucky Dube music here and, so much great music over—what, the last 20 years or more?

**A:** It would be about 20 years or maybe just a little over, yeah. A little over 20 years now.

**Q:** You're from South Africa and yet you're one of the world's great reggae performers—that's kind of unusual.

**A:** [Laughs] Well, I get that all the time, and of course wherever we go people would think we are from Jamaica and stuff because that's where—that's what reggae is known for. You talk reggae music, you talk Jamaica. You talk Jamaica they think reggae music. Or sometimes you talk reggae they think ganja and stuff like that.

**Q:** But reggae music is a music of liberation that's gone international and you're one of the people who really held to the high ground of reggae when a lot of Jamaican reggae kind of turned in another direction. You stuck with a sound and a style that we first came to know through artists like Jimmy Cliff and Bob Marley and the Wailers, Peter Tosh—and so great thanks to you for keeping this great revolutionary music happening.

**A:** Yeah, mon! It happens as an artist all the time that there's new styles come in all the times and always you would be attracted to change but we were fortunate that we were still attracted to the old-school thing, we were still attracted to the the to the Bob Marley, Peter Tosh style of message-based music instead of what's happening now.

**Q:** Interestingly now there's kind of been a return to conscious and cultural music with a lot of new young Jamaican artists who have sort of picked up that torch and are moving that message music forward again.

**A:** Which is good!

**Q:** So you really helped create a bridge that brought us to the present time from the classic time. And your sound is so classic too, even the keyboard sound that you use on your records, the arrangements, the number of instruments that you use—when did you really start playing in the reggae style? I know your earliest records were really more in an African style, right?

**A:** Yeah, it was *mbaqanga*, like this one I was looking at right now [holds up the Celluloid album *Umadakeni* featuring a cover photo before he had grown dreadlocks] this is from the mbaqanga era *Umadakeni*. Yeah, that was mbaqanga. But now when we started doing reggae we kinda incorporated the mbaqanga sound into the reggae we were doing just to give it a unique sound so it doesn't sound like anybody else, it just sounds like Lucky Dube, that's it. Even though the inspiration comes from Peter Tosh, Jimmy Cliff, Bob Marley and those guys but we didn't want to sound like them, we just got the inspiration from them and we kind of incorporated the Zulu stuff, the mbaqanga stuff into the reggae.

**Q:** Well, and also you have an amazing vocal range so that you can do a low Peter Tosh kind of a voice, or a voice out of the Temptations, I mean, your vocal range is pretty incredible.

**A:** Well thank you.

**Q:** Yes, great singer, great writer, great artist and many great cds and records over the years but we want to concentrate on some of this new music because this is an excellent new cd so now I want to play the song called “Respect” from the new album and we're gonna come back and speak live in the studio with Lucky Dube.

*I give love to those who give me love and love to those who give me war.  
I love those who hate me, I bless even those who curse me.*

—Lucky Dube, “Respect.”

**Q:** I have a couple of cds by your band the Slaves. Do you have the same band, or some changes over the years?

**A:** Well, over the years there has been some changes you know, because people need to grow, you know, sometimes some of the guys go to be producers, some of them go to be whatever whatever, we have some changes yes in the band but we still have two guys from the original band Slaves still with us.

Continued on page 63



# Legends Of Reggae



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## THE PRIDE OF THE GARIFUNA

*Continued from page 35*

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

*Continued from page 37*

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 was 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

*Continued from page 39*

**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

*Continued on page 64*





## LAST VISIT WITH LUCKY DUBE

*Continued from page 63*

I'll cross the river for you baby," because that's a lie—you know you find that a singer would sing those kind of things and he cannot even swim!

**Q:** To climb that metaphorical mountain.

**A:** So I cannot lie with music and some of the stuff, yes, is based on my personal experience and some of it of course is from people because we get a lot of feedback from people about the music that we write and some of the stories that we write about is stuff that we get from people. Say after a show we would sit there with people and just talk to them and they would tell us maybe how the music helped them and things like that.

Just like the song "Celebrate Life." I think we were in the Caribbean some time ago, I can't remember the island whether it's Anguilla or whatever, one of those islands and after the show a guy comes to us and we're backstage, tired and everything so he wants to see us and we always make time to talk, meet and greet people. And the guy says "I'm so happy to see you" and ah, like, OK, great, he says "Nice show. But I have a story to tell you. You know, I was a rich man, I had everything, I had a wife and then I divorced my wife, whatever, and now she took everything, somehow with the lawyers they did whatever they did and she kind of took everything and I was ready to go and kill myself. And then I heard on the radio that you are coming here and I kinda"—he postponed his suicide thing because he had to see us! And after listening to the music and we talked to him for about an hour or something and he said wow, you know, I now kind of feel the need to be alive again. And I need to celebrate being alive and that's when we kind of wrote that song.

**Q:** What great power music has.

**A:** Yeah!

**Q:** All right we're gonna give a listen now to the song "Changing World" from the new cd and we'll come back and speak live again with Lucky Dube.

*He has no crystal ball but he sees the future*

*Doesn't like what he sees, but what can he do?*

—Lucky Dube, "Changing World"

**Q:** What a forward contemporary guitar sound you have on this one!

**A:** Yes, yes! We always like to do some rock stuff. Because I still listen to rock music right now. I like rock. And so we take a little bit from rock as well and bring it together with reggae, together with mbaqanga just to get a unique sound.

**Q:** I want to thank you so much for coming by, I know you've got sound check and things to deal with, thanks very much for being with us on "Reggae Central."

**A:** Thank you man. We're looking forward to seeing everybody at this show and we have a new album, it's called *Respect* and of course we will be playing from the older stuff because it's still very much alive and so we're gonna play some tracks from the new album *Respect* and this is gonna be great so we're looking forward to seeing everybody out there tonight!

**Q:** Thanks so much for joining us here and I'm

going to close with the song called "Political Games."

**A:** "Political Games. To them it's only a job, but to us it hurts to the bone." ★

## ALL OVER THE MAP

*Continued from page 25*

you're not out under the harvest moon.

### INDIA

**Zakir Hussain, *Best of Zakir Hussain*** (ARC Music): "Best"? I don't know about that. Great? Yes. The prolific master of the tabla is showcased in solo and duet selections, which provide ample evidence of his amazing mastery of more rhythms than can be imagined by mere mortals. I'd like a true "best of" from him, which would have to include the Diga Band, Shakti, Tabla Beat Science, much solo stuff. Bring it on, he said, respectfully.

***Rough Guide to Indian Lounge*** (World Music Network): I tend to boycott any cd with "lounge" in the title. What are they thinking? Who wants to "lounge"? Never mind. At least there is some very enjoyable music here, most of it propulsive enough to, er, rock the lounge, and other than Apache Indian and Bally Sagoo, the artists are all new to me. Some of this is quite beautiful so excuse the title and enjoy.

**Anousha Shankar and Karsh Kale, *Breathing Under Water*** (Manhattan): Speaking of beautiful, Anoushka Shankar has some very good genes. No, no, I mean musically. Beyond her glammed-up allure in the photos here, she has already proven to be an emerging master on the sitar, sometimes playing with her legendary father—as happens here on two gorgeous tracks. Her debut solo cd *Rise* was very well done, but here we get, egads, Sting, and her relation Norah Jones, to sell "product." Pick and choose any type of sound—that's what Shankar and Kale have done here, it seems—and you'll likely find something to strike your fancy.

### POP TILL YOU DROP

**Joe Henry, *Civilians*** (Anti-): This singer/songwriter with a gruff voice and fairly dark view on human relations and other things has a growing following due to his inventive, evocative songs and arrangements. He's been around for going on two decades but this new release is being heralded as his best yet. I don't know yet, being still stuck on his cd *Scar* from a few years back, wherein he had the honor of having Ornette Coleman as a guest (and before that, he'd roped in the late legend Don Cherry). This ain't jazz, as those icons might suggest, but bluesy/folky Americana at its best. ★

## AFRICAN BEAT

*Continued from page 48*

warm food handed through an open window.

*Zilizopendwa* starts right out with a love song, "Kama Kweli Wanipenda," that firmly sticks its tongue into the cheek of the eternal, pleading question, "I want to know if it's true you love

me;" which the King quickly follows up with "I want to know if you love me because of my money or because I'm manager of the bank. Tell me why you love me; I want to know. Tell me why you care."

He wraps it up and rings down the 11-song dance-alicious musical discussion with an uptempo "Mtoto wa Mjini," number, which sings the praises of Dar es Salaam and the many bands who have played in the nightclubs there—Msondo Ngoma, OSS, DDC Mlimani Park, Jamhuri Jazz, Kiko Jazz, Uda Jazz and Police Jazz. I want to know who all these wonderful musicians were, but I am quite content to simply listen over and over and over.

Mr. Wamala has informed me that a new recording by the King, who will be accompanied by some of the all-time greats of the *muziki wa dansi* scene, the Tanzanian All Stars, including veterans of some of those above-mentioned bands, Muhaddin Ngurumo, Badu Kabeya, Hasani Bitchuka, Huseni Jumbe, Shabani Dede, Said Mabera, Tshimanga Assosa and Bonivila, will soon be released. Sometime after that, *Msondo Ngoma Vol. Two* will follow. Stay tuned to this station and hopefully elsewhere for further developments. [[ujamaarecords@aol.com](mailto:ujamaarecords@aol.com)]

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## PAPA WEMBA

*Continued from page 51*

All three fit in well with the Viva style of animating but, like the singers, sound integrated but at the same time slightly invisible.

If I sound slightly critical of *Nkunzi Nlele* it is because I am not entirely convinced by the whole album. In recent months I have been listening to much old Viva la Musica music and most of it is so exceptionally good that it makes the new group pale in comparison. Despite this there are a few tracks that manage to reinforce my belief that Papa Wemba is still capable of leading a tight and creative band. Santiago's "Bitumba ya Ba Baba" pulls out some great vocal performances, especially from Christian Lema who also excels on his own composition "Fay." Wemba's "J.P. Walter" is sweet, and Guy Guy Fall's "Surprise" is a classic which allows all the singers a chance to sing a solo line. It also allows him to demonstrate how his voice sounds like a perfect cross between ex-Viva stars Reddy Amisi and Stino Mubi. Another highlight is Iko's "Diente" which revives the traditional *lokole* log drum that Wemba championed back in the mid-'70s. *Nkunzi Nlele* will not go down as one of the greatest-ever Papa Wemba albums but it is a satisfying return to the style of music that he does best—modern Congolese music, not watered-down "world music."

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