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# REMEMBERING BOB

## ALTON ELLIS

### “Bob Is Strong, Very Strong”

Bob is just something else, you know. It's going to take up a long time for me to tell you what I know about Bob. Bob is not an easy person to get along with. Bob is strong, very strong. Bob is sure of himself and need no help from when he was a youth. I'll tell you the first conversation I had with Bob. He came to Downbeat studio and did a couple of records. He was living up Third Street and I was living at Fifth Street. Joe Higgs live at Third Street and Joe Higgs help tutor him, 'cause Joe was out there before even me. I was passing Bob's house and saw them rehearsing under a tree, and I say to him, “My bredren, I want to tell you something. I love the song you do, but you see that producer what name Downbeat? Watch him!” And to my surprise, Bob stop and say to me, nicely, “Don't need any advice. I can manage when I get to Downbeat.” And I left there that day spinning, how him just answer me so abrupt. Is years after I realize it was the positiveness within the man, the strength within the man. So all my little advice wasn't necessary, 'cause him did pass that. Bob is a man, you go in the studio one morning and say, “Hail Dread,” and pass him, and you come out in the evening and don't talk to him, he's angry as if you is the most enemy for months. And big tall guys dem afraid of Bob, everybody afraid of Bob, and him never fight yet. Him don't fight. He was so powerful spiritually that even big guys stand back. The right word at the right time everytime make even the big mountain guys step back. That's the man I'm telling you about, not the music.

## LINTON KWESI JOHNSON

### “His Music Will Live On Forever”

“Bob Marley for me, is one of the greatest artists Jamaica ever produced, one of the greatest musicians we've seen in the modern era. Comparable, to my way of thinking, to Otis Redding, Jimi Hendrix as a musician. Political figures? I don't think he had any comparison. Because I didn't see Bob as a political animal per se. I saw him as a great singer and a great songwriter. One of those rare individuals that history produces only so often who is able to absorb all that is happening around him and create something meaningful out of it. I think that his greatness lay in the fact that he was able to incorporate other elements into Jamaican popular music, thereby taking it out of its local, national limitations, and making it available to a much wider, international audience. I think that was a tremendous achievement. Obviously there were certain compromises he had to make in his music, but I think in the end he did it with a lot of integrity and in a principled kind of way. His music will live on forever.

... There are scores of examples of people that have written about specific or particular things which have universal application. Take for example, Bob might write a song like “Waiting in Vain,” which I think is one of the greatest love songs ever. Now that song must have been rooted in a particular experience, but then love is a universal theme and that song has a universal application. Whether you are in Timbuktu or Russia you could identify with a song like that.”

## PETER TOSH

### On Stage with the Wailers

One time I was performing at the Ward Theatre. Wailers. Well, now, me start sing. boy! Is just kind of money come up on stage. Poof! Drop beside me some, poof! Blood clot! Me look at some two-and-six-pence lick me head, and all them things. By the hundreds! Why we say, me couldn't do that, so I stop sing and just go on and pick them up. You know what me pick up man? Pick up me two pocket full! And before I come off the stage, it was begged out! Every man in the audience come beg it out back. Just beg out everything! (Laughter) Man just beg it out, and me look and me have two-and-six left in me hand, with the two pocket full of money, yeah man! But those amusing still, 'cause me just laugh. Me have some very fantastic experiences on stage, man! One time me was performing at the Palace Theatre and the people was waiting to see the Wailers, and them can't see the Wailers, and a band named the Vikings was playing, and the people were “We want the Wailers! Wailers!!” and them can't see no Wailers. The time, we was in the dressing room, waiting, but we had to wait until that band finish. Well, the people was impatient and some blood clot back like this—WOOF! (Makes furious pitching motion) Man have fe run off stage, mon. Yes, mon! Every instrument mash up! 'Cause the people want to see the Wailers!



## ALTON ELLIS

### Bob's Lyrics

Bob can put a story into words so easy! Things that are around you every day and you would step past it, and Bob would see it as a big story when him put the lyrics together. He can tie the lyrics with the music so the music embrace the lyric so close that it form a melodious flow. This is a problem I find with a lot of singers, their lyrics is so strong and without the combination of it and the music together it sound as if—it doesn't come over. Something missing, you know. Bob have that combination of embracing lyrics with melody. It's only the Beatles I put in front of Bob as recording artists.

## MARTHA VELEZ

### Working with Bob

Martha Velez was the only singer outside of the Wailers whom Bob Marley ever produced. Here she tells of what that experience in 1975 was like.

The sessions began in April and May, 1975, at Tuff Gong in J.A., a converted pigeon coop all concreted up in back of Island House. We'd go back there, Bob, myself, a guitar player usually, and Seeco, who was a percussionist, Bob's father figure, a really close friend, real good partner and wonderful sweet man. We'd sit there, and Bob would sing tunes and I'd say, "Oh, yes, that sounds like one I can sing." We would try songs like "Happiness" or "There You Are," and he'd say (whispering) "Yeah, mon, that sounds good." And I'd think, "Oh, great. Bob Marley says it sounds good, so it's O.K.!" When I went to Jamaica, I was amazed that Bob was treated as almost a patron saint there. When we traveled to Negril, Bob drove across the island, and everywhere we stopped on the road, to buy oranges or whatever, I saw the incredible reverence that people had for him. The respect was not like that for a rock'n'roll idol, it was much deeper. I knew I was with a very special person who understood his purpose and was not in any way abusing his ability to move people, but instead was moving people in the most righteous way. I have to say that it was a real inspirational time, and I kept wondering and am still wondering, why I had that opportunity, why I was somehow chosen to experience this for a moment. I still don't know that answer. Maybe I will sometime.

## TONY G

### Bob's Honesty and Fairness

For two years, Tony G(arnett) was Bob Marley's road manager, and was also Bob's emcee on the first live lp. He recalls especially Bob's "honesty and fairness if he has to judge. He's not partial at all. He can see where right prevails — it can be his closest friend, his mother, whatever. I

think the best picture of who Bob really is, is on the Rastaman Vibration album, where he interpreted Biblical prophecies in terms of people's behavior today. There's nothing new under the sun... He tried to be a genuine soul the best way he can. I saw every character in him. Like the way he would wear a screwface to keep people away. When you are pure in heart, you can feel when impurity comes near you. The spirits don't mesh."





# BOB THE PROPHET



Photo by Peter Simon ©1984

by Dawta Jamaka

*"And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day." Is. 58:10*

**T**hey have called him many things—prophet, psalmist, peacemaker, poet. His influence has been felt in every conceivable corner of the earth, and his music has been adopted by freedom fighters as well as lovers and lullaby-singers. Some say his was one of the most conscious voices of the 1970's. My own feelings about the man known to most of the world as Bob Marley echo these statements and much more.

Looking back, I suppose the first time I heard Bob's music was around 1972, when the *Catch A Fire* album was released. I loved it right from the start because of its heartbeat riddims and powerful messages of spiritual strength, dignity and passion. It was unlike any music I had ever heard, and at the same time, more natural to I than the rock and pop commercial radio had to offer. If I had been ready to hear what Bob was saying back then, my life would have been much different. But JAH alone know the right time for each of H.I.M. children, and I had to go through many tribulations to finally sight-up Truth.

As a person of mixed blood and cultural heritages Iself, I felt that bond with Bob right away. I had always had a war going on inside Iself—who was I? What group did I truly belong to? I had always been made

intensely conscious of the fact that I was "different" from not only the favoured ones in this society, but also the others who, because they were recognizable among each other, "fit in" with their own groups. Sometimes I felt this difference made I special, but I was also made to feel apart, not belonging, not really accepted. I know Bob had this problem throughout his life, even to the point of being rejected by his own African countrymen because of his mixed blood. His pride made I hold I head higher, knowing, as Bob taught I, that I am a daughter of Selassie I Jah Rastafari Almighty God, with no need to make any apology. Realizing that fact, I was no longer shackled by prejudice or nationalism—I was free. But it took many years of experiencing tribulation and the false sense of pleasure Babylon can delude us with before I was able to sight-up Jah Rastafari.

During the years when Bob was living his most public life, I was listening to the music Bob played, never really absorbing the message because I was too wrap-up in trying to gratify my own needs. At my lowest point, I was seriously asking myself whether I had a reason for being here at all, and whether it would matter if I wasn't. I had gone through a lot of pain in life, and everything seemed futile, not good enough. My many tries at seeking Wisdom, Truth, and Love had all failed, because each "way" seemed to fall short. Just at this point in my life, something compelled I to buy all of Bob's readily

available music, and listen. I can't say there was a dramatic, sudden change in I when I started listening, but I heart and soul and mind were definitely ready to know what Bob was saying. How much I felt it when he sang:

*"No sun will shine in my day today  
The high yellow moon won't come out to play  
I seh darkness has covered my light  
And it's changed my day to night  
Oh where is this love to be found  
Oh life, must be somewhere to be found,  
yeah  
Instead of concrete jungle, I seh  
what have you got for me now?  
No chains around my feet, but I'm not free  
I know I am bound here in captivity  
And I never know happiness  
And I never know what sweet caress is  
Still... I'll be always laughing  
like a clown  
Won't somebody help me now? \**

\* ("Concrete Jungle" ©1971, Cayman Music)

It was the best expression of what I had gone through all my life that I had ever heard—perhaps my favourite song. An anguished statement of deprivation and hunger on all levels, but through it a line of wanting something better, knowing better must come—but how?

The more I listened, the more answer I found. At first I was questioning—a living

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## NEWS & REVIEWS REGGAE KING

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in psychedelic clothes, flower-bedecked guitars, and Bob's head bandaged from "trancing-out" on stage once too often.

There are fascinating interviews that plumb the emotional depths of Bob's last days, with his mother, with Rita, and with one of his baby-mothers, Cindy Breakspere. Skill Cole and bassist Family Man Barrett break their silences as well, and there is much in these pages that will move you to tears.

A few minor corrections are in order, however. The back cover announces "a complete and exhaustive discography" which turns out to be only two columns long, and is, in fact, lifted directly from Penny Reel's U.K. disc listing in a 1981 British music weekly. The fact that there are only three Wailers singles listed under "Coxsone" should tip one to the fact that Tim White's remains the only legitimate discography ever attempted. On page 40 a photo caption says, "the house where Bob was born still stands as sturdy as ever..." while on the facing page the text declares, "The house where Bob was born no longer stands." (That same page has a marvelous shot of young Bob in the Wail'n Soul'm record shack, taken by Rita.) On page 61, the fiction is repeated that Bob fled Delaware in '66 because he received a draft notice, something which Cedella Booker has emphatically denied in talks with Stephen Davis. Also it is stated that Bob's first label of his own was called "Wailing Souls," confusing the group with the real name, "Wail'n Soul'm." Nor did Bob "plan a free 'Smile Jamaica' concert;" he was inveigled into doing it by PNP politicians, who had told him it would not be a political event. The apocryphal tale of Don Taylor supposedly hurling his body in front of Bob when the assassination attempt was made, is also given new life. The lie is put to it, however, on page 124, where a reproduction of the initial newspaper accounting states quite plainly, "'Don Taylor was shot in the groin at the doorway leading to an outside section of the house, according to the eyewitness reports.'"

Buy this book for its touching insights, great interviews, and rare photos; tolerate the poor b&w repros; then rejoice in Bob describing his own sound: "You getting a three in one music, you know. You getting happy rhythm with a sad sound with a good vibration... My music will go on forever. Maybe it's a fool say that, but when me know facts me can say facts, you know. My music go on forever."

—Roger Steffens

On the occasion of saluting Bob Marley, I'd like to first note that the title of this column comes from the Wailers' classic "Cornerstone," whose haunting air of ultimate judgment echoes in my mind every time I see the phrase. So this column is always a Bob Marley testament but this month I'd like the testimony to be more personal and overt.

Oddly enough, I don't play Bob Marley records very often, either on my radio show or in home. Why? Because, in a sense, my initial hearing of his music, *Catch A Fire* and *African Herbsman*, filled me up so completely that to draw more from that well would be superfluous, even gluttonous. If I'd never heard anything else by him or the Wailers, my consciousness would still have been irrevocably altered—musically and spiritually. To me, Marley's music is a powerful elixir that should be reserved for appropriate moments. So, when I do pull out one of his records, it's instantly fresh, profoundly gratifying.

I came to know *African Herbsman* in Nigeria in 1974. Flipping through a rack of records, mostly African, sprinkled in with a few Trojan reggae lps, I came upon the Wailers lp. I had no idea what the material was (the jacket almost made it look like a bootleg) but having been transformed by *Catch A Fire*, I bought it. When I got to my room, I wasted no time in throwing it on the tiny little portable phonograph I had. What I heard was a revelation. The wailing Impressions-style harmonies immediately gladdened my heart and the stuttering, insidiously addictive rhythms quickened my pulse but it was Bob's scatting, declamatory singing that transfixed me. As he worked and reworked the melody in and out of the rhythm he seemed to be pouring out his spirit in some kind of shamanistic trance. I played the record over and over, marveling at the urgent, edgy voice crying out from my tinny speakers.

On one of the few occasions that I came face-to-face with Bob Marley, he charged me, as a radio programmer, to make my show "more than just music—education-

## BOB THE PROPHET

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God? Right on this earth, in this time? It wasn't easy to believe—or disbelieve, the more I thought about it. For the first time in I life, I began studying Jah-Word, on my own, with no guidance except the thoughts and feelings of one small man, born in obscurity of dark and light, poverty and degradation, who, by the Power of the Almighty, became the Moses of these times for InI. No one else had ever been able to guide I, but when Bob spoke, InI could sight-up the Message loud and clear. InI would have to say the man save InI alive when I seemed destined to self-

# The Stone That The Builder Refused...

by Randall Grass

al," something he was fond of saying. That was something I was already trying to do but I still reflect on his words as a reminder. His statement urged seriousness of purpose, a seriousness that dedicated his own life, which distilled the essence of Bob's spirit. For, you see, perhaps the most unique thing about him, which set him apart from many equally talented musicians, was his willingness to let himself be stretched and drained by the multifaceted demands of the global system which he felt must be dealt with if he were to accomplish his work. He walked amidst Babylon's glitter, even allowed Babylonian agents to use him, to a degree, if it furthered his purpose. After all that was the only way to reach the multitudes. He did this without ever losing touch with himself—there were precious few stumbles along the way. But it was tremendously exhausting, this sacrifice of himself to the endless media demands, the money-men, the hangers-on, and even his public, without giving in to the easy, tempting escapes continually made available. And the exhaustion probably hastened his death.

So, I pay tribute to the spirit of Bob Marley, a spirit which lives as strong as ever. The best tribute is a dedication of one's own life, a dedication which emulates Bob's devotion to propagating righteousness. In the end, it is the only tribute that matters.

Randall Grass is host of Roots, Rock, Reggae on WPXN, Philadelphia.

destruct, and through his faith, InI am now able to stand firm and live up in JAH Light. Whenever I am doubtful or fearful, InI remember the night when he stood alone in the middle of a vast sea of people, hardly able to hold his guitar after suffering a paralyzing stroke, and sang the only thing he ever knew—a redemption song, a song of freedom for all JAH children everywhere. That song will live forever as an anthem for us all—InI know as sure as JAH live, that the Light of the Trinity, Berhane Selassie, live forever too. JAH has promised it. ★