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THE SWELL AND CRASH OF SKA'S FIRST WAVE:
A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF REGGAE'S PREDECESSORS
IN THE EVOLUTION OF JAMAICAN MUSIC

INTRODUCTION

Ska music has always been a truly extraordinary genre. With a unique musical construct, the genre carries with it a deeply cultural, sociological, and historical livelihood which, unlike any other style, has adapted and changed through three clearly-defined regional and stylistic reigns of prominence. The music itself may have changed throughout the three “waves,” but its meaning, its message, and its themes have transcended its creation and two revivals with an unmatched adaptiveness to thrive in wildly varying regional and sociocultural climates. From the native peoples of Jamaica to the colonization of the island, the African slave trade to the country’s independence, and through two revivals -- one in the United Kingdom and another later the United States -- the odyssey of ska music celebrates a truly distinct and rich history.

When ska’s alluring sound first filled my ears at an early age, I couldn’t help but take note. Its energy was unlike that of any genre I’d ever heard before. This early exposure to the music I’d come to identify with so strongly came from the movie *Basketball*, in which Reel Big Fish made an appearance and Smashmouth’s cover of “Why Can’t We Be Friends” was featured. I found gems through *Tony Hawk’s Pro Skater* as well, a video game which featured third-wave ska hits “New Girl” by The Suicide Machines and legendary third-wave standard “Superman” by Goldfinger. I didn’t know it by name, but any time I heard ska from then on, I sought out the source and began to collect every third-wave source I could find. Goldfinger, The Suicide Machines, Reel Big Fish, Big D and the Kids Table, Streetlight Manifesto, Catch 22, The Planet Smashers, Westbound Train, Less Than Jake, Sublime, Operation Ivy, Deal’s Gone Bad, The Arrogant Sons Of Bitches, The Toasters, and The Aquabats are only a few of the bands that I began to latch onto when investigating this mysterious genre.

In high school, I knew that I wanted to pursue music in whatever capacity possible. Ska became my passion, and I began playing with a ska band in high school from whom I learned that the genre’s history went much deeper than *Tony Hawk’s Pro Skater* and *Basketball*. I started looking into this extensive history, and my curiosity carried me deeper and deeper. Throughout college, every project I could possibly assign ska as the subject of I so did. Since I first decided to pursue music as a major, I knew ska would be the centerpiece of my aspirations.

In exploration of the genre, my aim is to not only explain its history. I seek to acknowledge the contexts and importance it carried as a means for expression through its travels. The study of ska music includes analysis of its defining musical character, but furthermore, requires investigation of its historical significance. The music isn’t just about a horn section and an offbeat-driven guitar. It’s the sound of the oppressed and disenfranchised: the sound of the youth, of unity, rebellion, and of the people. This exploration of ska music is not just a venture into the “what?” but more importantly, the “who cares?” as well.

1. Before There Were Sound Systems: A Brief History Jamaica

1.1 The Island's First Musical Tradition

The first inhabitants of what is now Jamaica were the Ciboney, believed to have a history there since 1000 A.D. Arawaks, the native people of South America and the Greater Antilles, later migrated to the island. Though unwritten and predating recording technology by centuries, the Arawak had a musical tradition whose history survives through oral tradition. The Arawak fashioned primitive instruments from resources around the island for ceremonial purposes. They are said to have crafted trumpets out of leafstalks or hollow wood, flutes carved out of wild cane, and manatee-skin drums fashioned from the trunk of the trumpet tree. Reserved for only the chief were seashell tambourine-like and stringed instruments. Being such the musical melting pot of styles as ska was, Arawak musical tradition may have survived as an influence of the genre more than half a millennium after their Jamaican population's extinction (Augustyn 1-2).

1.2 European Conquest And Slavery Come To Xamayca

As it was known then, Xamayca was first conquered by Spanish settlers. When they arrived in the Americas around 1500, they brought with them European diseases to which the Arawak had no immunity. By 1540, the entire Arawak population on the island was extinct. The Spanish settlers' efforts to develop Xamayca were minimal. The island's function was primarily that of a food source for traveling conquistadors on their way around the Caribbean, South America, and Central America. Sugar plantations were quickly established. To perform the arduous field work on these plantations, the first slaves were brought to the island in 1517 as the Atlantic slave trade began to emerge.

Around the mid-sixteenth century, Xamaica became a sought-after by exploring nations for its abundance of resources. The European empires of the time began to war over

the territory as Italy, France, Holland, Portugal, and England ventured to the Americas and contended for control. The British emerged as the ultimate victor and seized control of the island from Spain in 1655, establishing the territory a colony. The new colony began to see a massively increased influx of African slaves. By 1775, Jamaica's slave population was 192,787 (Augustyn, 3-5).

1.3 The Slave Era And Music

Throughout the Atlantic slave trade, Africans captured and forced into slavery were stripped of their culture. This effort resulted in the forced assimilation of slaves into European cultural traditions -- among them music. Jamaica was an exception to this trend. Plantation owners allowed for their slaves to maintain the culture of their homeland in the belief that this would increase productivity. It is important to note, however, that although slaves' African culture was not ripped from them by their owners in Jamaica as fervently as in other areas, they were not blessed with lenience. Slave conditions in Jamaica were no less harsh and desperate than they were in the U.S. or other slave-based economies dependent on the Atlantic trade.

Sugar was an enormously important commodity in the English economy. Jamaica's held immense importance for producing massive amounts of this lucrative crop. The English government on the island at the time was the Jamaica Assembly. The elite white class of growers on the island, through this branch, enjoyed complete control the internal affairs of the island. Some regulations of rationing, leisure time, work hours, and appropriate punishment were in place in British Law, but provisions were not made defining the regulations' implementation. The slaves were thus at the complete mercy of their owners, whose interest was in keeping them controlled. Work hours were extensive, living standards were low, and punishment was inhumane and discretionary -- normally consisting of flogging

by cart whip. But money ruled, and by 1763, Jamaica was responsible for more sugar production than the combined yield of every other British West Indian island (Turner, 1-2).

Even within the unbridled suffering of the Atlantic slave trade, music could be found. Surprisingly, along their journey across the Atlantic, slaves were encouraged to participate in music. Transported in cramped compartments to maximize human storage capacity in the hulls of ships, captured Africans would be unable to move for hours or even days at a time. They were stacked on racks with minimal room between their neighbors and from their bunk to the next above. They were shackled and packed so densely that days spent laying in pooling excrement led to horrible disease and some would asphyxiate on their own vomit because their faces were so close to the next rack they were unable to turn their head.

Because these transportation conditions were so extreme, efforts were made to keep slaves in adequate physical condition with exercise periods. One form of exercise involved song. They would sing a tune and accompany it with clapping and stomping. Under rare circumstance, the musically gifted may have even been allowed to take an instrument onboard. Historian Garth White writes of the music on this voyage:

Music could also be heard from the Europeans in various forms like sailors' chanties, fife and fiddle-playing, European folk-song, religious hymns and from martial airs. At times then, the musical climate could have been quite dense -- grunts of pain, lamenting wails, the notes of a thumb piano or stick or drum, scores of feet stomping, repeated song choruses, rhythmic clapping, sailors' ditties, hymns and marches blowing in the winds of the Atlantic. (White 7-8)

Throughout the colony, slave musicians quickly picked up on European musical forms. They were assigned to perform for plantation owners and other slaves, as well as for their own purposes. They made due with dismal resources, fashioning their own instruments like drums, flutes, makeshift lutes, African harps, and thumb-pianos. The occasional traveling troupe served alongside clerics, soldiers, and sailors to spread the popular European musical styles of the time to the slave population. This familiarized the field workers with European instruments and songs.

One such exposure slaves received was to European religion. Although they were allowed to maintain their African religions, rituals, and most importantly, music, Christianity -- the Baptist denomination especially -- did have its effect on Jamaican slave music. The style of British church hymns found its way into work songs. Field workers were known to improvise music to lift their spirits through their harsh daily labors. These “field” or “digging songs” were often in a call-and-response format and held a variety of subject matter. They could serve as a cheerful recreation, folk song, religious chanting and so-on. This blend is of great importance as it informs the Revivalist music of the nineteenth century, which continues even today, and had great influence in the development of ska.

1.4 The Great Revival and Its Influence On Post-Slave Era Jamaican Music

In 1834, slavery was abolished in Jamaica. The mid-nineteenth century saw a religious revolution among the newly emancipated slave population in Jamaica. Several cults began to form around the island. Among the vast list of religious cults which formed at this time were the Pukkumina, Kumina, and Zion. These religions were a blend of African and European religions. The cults’ practices included unique musical traditions characteristic of this mixture which had brewed throughout the slave era. They represented a very strong emphasis on African rhythms, instrumentation, and ceremony. Their practices and beliefs were blended between Christianity and that of African spirituality -- specifically Myal. This belief holds that there exist both temporal and spiritual worlds (Augustyn 5).

The music of the Pukkumina and Kumina practices incorporated vocal percussive sounds in their music. They had a heavy over-breathing element to their music which was used as percussion and to induce trances. This kind of vocal percussion may have influenced the unique percussive toasting pervasive in Ska, such as “hup, hup, hup” and “ch-ch-ch-ch.” The Zion Revival occurred mostly in areas of Jamaica with large European populations. The

Zion employed bodily percussion like clapping and stomping in its music. It also included the heavy presence of West African-influenced drumming (Kauppila 76).

Myal

Myal involves communication with God and ancestral spirits through ritual. Spirits, called duppies, could contact the living through dreams or when one is in a trance-like state. These spirits could possess the living during ceremony and fell into two groups: the myal spirits (good) and the obeah spirits (harmful). Myal's prominence during slave uprisings led it to be considered dangerous, and its practice was outlawed in 1774 under penalty of death. As a result, Myalism ritual was veiled. "In order to disguise Africanisms, in the early 1800s European and Christian sonic, sartorial and symbolic elements were incorporated" (McCarthy 84).

Music is of paramount significance in Myal ceremony. West African traits present in this music include repeated chants and drum- and body-percussion-accompanied dance performed in circular formation. The percussive instruments performed in Myal ceremony included the larger stick-stricken bon, or panya, a smaller finger-drum called a gombay, and shakers fashioned from gourds. Vocal pattern follows call-and-response format. The songs are mostly arranged in short, repeating melodic and rhythmic themes (84).

Maroons

When the Spanish lost control of the Jamaica in 1655, their slaves were released in the chaos. They fled to the mountains at the East and North ends of the island where they remained isolated from British influence. Their rebellions are a celebrated legend. Infamous Maroon leader Cudjoe is one such legend, whose legacy lives on with a holiday honoring him every January 6. Although mostly of Coromantee African ancestry, the Maroons were of

diverse heritage, and spoke many different languages. Music became a vital element of camaraderie and communication.

Elements of Myal tradition are represented in the Maroons' unique dance, religion, and music, named Kromanti Play. Maroon culture was virtually untouched by outsiders after they had established their own remote societies. Thus, the practice of their West African heritage was unchallenged and well-preserved. Koromanti Play employed many similar instruments and styles to its Myal forefather. One unique element is the abeng, a horn carved out of a cow's horn, which was used as an instrument as well as for signaling in times of war (McCarthy 89-90).

Burru

Burru was a massively influential style of drumming. Through the slave era, troops of Burru drummers traveled the island performing for plantation workers to lift morale and increase productivity. The Rastafarian faith adopted Burru drumming as a defining element of their religious music. In the twentieth century, this would come to influence the pioneers of ska, many of whom sought philosophical enlightenment from the Rastafari and participated in their musical traditions.

Burru performances could be found mostly in the areas of Clarendon and St. Catherine. It was a secularized form of Kumina dance performed simply for entertainment rather than calling ancestral spirits. Burru was even played for slave masters in the Great House. After emancipation, Burru performers relocated to urban areas and found employment performing at community dances. The Burru involved vocal accompaniment of miscellaneous percussion and three main drums. The repeater is the high-pitched lead drum, on which were played the busiest patterns. The mid-range fundeh plays less complicated ostinati patterns, and of course, the bass drum held the simplest rhythms. Percussion

instruments included the shakka (a bamboo scraper), rhumba box, and kazoo-like saxa. Their songs were mischievous and socially subversive. In the 1930s and 1940s, many Burru relocated from slum areas of the cities to Rastafarian camps in the mountains (McCarthy 92-93).

Jonkonnu

Jonkonnu is a festive social celebration held between December 24th and early January. Its roots are in the Ashanti fertility and harvest rituals, which originally celebrated the harvest season in late September and early October and in December to bring an end to the drought season. When it became anglicized in the slave era, its occurrence during the holiday season afforded workers a rare opportunity. They were allowed to congregate outside of plantation boundaries without penalty (McCarthy 106-107).

The festival's similarity to traditional European masquerade led slavers to assume that it was simply an imitation of their culture. This gave the oppressed participants a subversive advantage. Participants often dressed in flamboyant costumes and masks. Bands and vocal accompaniment included banjo, bamboo fifes, hollow lengths of bamboo stricken against each other or the ground, various drums, and various household items like pots and pans. Its communal atmosphere and musical style informed those to come, and bore a resemblance to the nature of the live ska experience. Augustyn writes: "everyone was a participant; Jonkunnu was not just a spectator event. Everyone performed, everyone played, everyone danced, and this custom was always a part of the people's music" (9).

1.5 Mento

In the 20th century, the blend of African slave music and European styles evolved into Jamaica's first commercially recorded folk music, mento. It is in mento music that the

offbeat accentuation in the rhythmic string accompaniment begins to take the shape. This musical feature would come to define ska music. Its European influence is heavily derived from the quadrille, a dance rhythm introduced to the island through the slave era. Performed mostly by street bands on portable instruments, this Jamaican folk style's instrumentation consisted mostly of guitar, banjo, bongos, kalimba, and some kind of shaker or grate/scraper instrument (McCarthy 131).

Mento is often confused with calypso, and though this Trinidadian style is closely related, mento holds a regional significance with enough distinguishing musical variation to classify it independently. As stated in the Jamaica Gleaner, "mento is commonly referred to as Jamaican calypso and although, to some extent, it resembles Trinidadian calypso, it is distinctly different in the beat. The music also holds pride of place as being Jamaica's first and, in a sense, most indigenous popular music" ("The Legend Of Mento"). Typical lyrical content in mento music was tropical, humorous, and sometimes sexually suggestive.

Mento in many ways laid a foundation for not only ska's musical character, but some elements of ska culture as well. There was a tradition among mento musicians, one that would continue into the dancehall and ska eras, whereby they began to claim slave owners' titles of nobility. They would identify themselves as Count, Lord, Duke, King, and Prince to name a few. This would occur later in ska with such prominent figures as Count Machuki, Duke Reid, and Prince Buster. This is one way that slave culture descendants claimed the power their ancestors had been deprived for centuries in an impoverished and rapidly urbanizing cultural landscape.

Mento music also represents an early example of uniformity in Jamaican music. The earlier forms of Revivalist music were largely separated by region, and varied slightly as such. But mento became a nationally popular form. Its origins date back to the slave era, but it is unclear how exactly it developed (White 9-10). Garth White explains:

Some linguists in attempting to trace the etymology of the term 'mento' advance an anterior Spanish derivation but are not quite certain. Many of the older musicians of today tell us that the form was known by their fathers, mothers, grandfathers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some say it was the Jamaicanized "fifth figure" of the quadrille - the well known pan-European popular music and dance form. By whatever route it took however, it seems as if by the middle years of the century mento had taken on the dimensions of a mass popular music. It has come to be seen as our first truly "national" music in that it transcended regional and parish boundaries. As had become usual, it took elements from the various traditional forms combining them with African and European instrumentation to bring into being a new form. (White 9)

Mento was the result of African rhythms blended with European musical tradition. It bloomed nationally out of the Revivalist musical movement to become the most largely influential indigenous Jamaican form on ska music. It would become a vital ingredient along with American R&B and big band & swing in the musical mixture that would come to be known as ska.

2. The Dancehall Era

The 1940s and '50s were the formative years of ska music in Jamaica. Though the term "ska" and defining musical characteristics did not fully develop until the 1960s, this era marks a firm movement toward its formation. Its name is derived from the venues where the music began to change. Prior to the dancehall era, popular music was largely rooted in Revivalist and European influence and performed in a festive or celebratory manner, usually outdoors. Though this spirit remained a big part of Jamaican music, its function as a medium of entertainment became more emphasized. The dancehall days saw the movement of music from the streets into the theaters -- the dance halls -- and the introduction of American music as a prominent influence in Jamaica.

2.1 Jazz and R&B In Jamaica

Radio Play in the Shantytowns

In the 1930s, '40s, and into the 1950s, popular music in America had two core genres that resonated with Jamaican listeners: big band & swing and R&B. It is at this time that the popular music of America began seeping into Jamaican society by several means, the first of which was by radio. The economy of Jamaica was shifting from the mono-crop colonial economy of the slave era to a diversifying and urbanizing economic landscape. Heathcott writes:

There can be no doubt that ska emerged from the intensely local world of urban (particularly Kingston) working-class Jamaican youth. At the same time, ska developed within the global context of rural dislocation, labor migration, and rapid urbanization, processes that turned peasant families into a rural and urban proletariat, and that unfolded within the development of U.S. and British economic colonialism in the Caribbean throughout the twentieth century. Sugarcane, bauxite mines, and the export platform prove as important to the development of ska music as shantytown social life. (Heathcott 185)

At this time, the largest industries became sugarcane (and other tropical agriculture), bauxite mining, and tourism. As cities began to grow and develop, there was a rapid population growth in urban areas that exceeded the amount of available work. Displaced farm workers and other hopefuls in search of a living flooded urban areas like Kingston, but were met with far less opportunity than they'd hoped for. Around the city, impoverished areas comprised largely of makeshift housing known as "shantytowns" began to emerge.

In these areas, few could afford radios, so enjoyment of programs was a communal event. People would gather around the few places where people did own radios and record players for a listen. Coxson Dodd was an extremely popular sound system operator, later turned producer, and in the hey-day of big band & swing enjoyed American radio at his parents' grocery store. He recounts his experience there: "When I'd get home from work, you know, 'cause at that time I was a mechanic... by 5:30, we'd be playing music and people would expect that and come from other parts of the city, stay outside and enjoy the music -- buy a lot of beer and stuff like that" (Baker).

Some of the broadcast stations that reached Jamaica were WINZ in Miami, WNOE in New Orleans, and WLAC in Nashville. The only station in Jamaica at this time was ZQI, which didn't play music, but instead featured mostly news or classical music. However, the appetite for American popular music on the island was too great for radio alone. Jazz and R&B music may have made its way to Jamaica largely through the airwaves, but they did more-so through distribution of records (Augustyn 16).

Record Exchange and Migrant Workers

During and after World War II, many American soldiers were stationed in Jamaica. They often brought with them their favorite records from the States. They brought their collections to play at USO clubs; Their collections of Big Band & Swing and R&B were in high demand from the growing Jamaican interest in the genres. Military members would often barter their records for some extra money or services. Sometimes these goods and services could be illicit, like marijuana or prostitution. (Kauppila 78)

Another common source for the import of American records was through the travels of migrant workers. Migrant work served as the most pervasive means by which ska would be nationally transplanted in later years, and in the early dancehall days served to transplant American popular music. Throughout the 1940s, Jamaican laborers would find seasonal work as farmhands in the American South. In their travels to the states, they would purchase popular records to bring home with them for enjoyment or resale. This would become a vital means by which sound system music was able to permeate the dancehall scene (Kauppila 79).

2.3 Live Music In Jamaica: Pre-Dancehall

The flow of American music into Jamaica established a demand for it among the people. Naturally, bands began to form in an effort to meet this demand. There was a split in

musical hierarchy as Jamaican musicians established their own big band traditions on the island: uptown music and downtown music. These factions would continue into the ska era and play a significant role in the cultural landscape of the music.

The Uptown and Downtown Sounds

In these early days, a big band tradition emerged on the island. Once radio and record presence established a demand for American music, bands were soon to follow to satisfy this appetite. Bands began to form, performing stock arrangements of American standards through available sheet music. There were two main factions of “road bands” in Jamaica: the uptown and the downtown bands.

The most lucrative opportunity for Jamaican musicians was through tourism. Rich vacationers came to Jamaica in droves for exotic getaways. High-class resorts commissioned big bands for entertainment, a means by which several Jamaican musicians were able to find good work. Wealthy tourists were treated to the popular big band standards of the time. The bands that performed this “high society” kind of music were known as uptown bands. They also played for those among the island’s own economically well-off upper class. The music of the people, however, was of a different character.

Classified in terms of both clientele and musical repertoire, the downtown band, music, and culture were very different from those of uptown. Downtown bands played for the ghetto folk, the lower-class who could afford to see them at the local dance halls. The love of jazz standards was not exclusive to the upper class, so the downtown road band would play many of the same jazz standards for the lower class. The main musical element distinguishing the two factions was that the downtown band’s set would include considerably more mento and calypso. As Garth White explains, “the ordinary road band could at times

play for "society folks" when they, on occasion, wanted something from the grass roots... But by and large the road bands would be playing "down so" - downtown, for ghetto folk..." (12).

The Alpha Boys School

The Alpha Boys school supplied Jamaica with its finest native-born musicians. In the dancehall and ska eras, it is from here that many of the most influential and innovative musicians received their training. In 1880, Sisters of Mercy Justina Ripoll, Josephine Ximenes, and Louise Dugiol pooled their money to purchase forty-three acres of land in south-central Kingston and established an orphanage. The Alpha Cottage School, as it was first known, expanded in 1883 to welcome boys as well. In 1890, the school was registered as an industrial school and began receiving government funding. Among the trades taught at the school for obtaining meaningful employment was music.

A figure of paramount importance in the Alpha Boys School's musical contribution to the creation of ska was Sister Mary Ignatius Davies. Born November 18, 1921 in Innswood, St. Catherine, Davies moved to Kingston as a young girl where she attended the girls' section of Alpha Academy. Upon graduation, she joined the Sisters of Mercy and began service at the academy in 1939. Sister Ignatius was a loving mentor to the wayward boys attending the school. She played games with the boys, sometimes strapping on a pair of gloves and boxing them, and often shared her extensive record collection on her own personal deejay equipment for instruction or simple entertainment. This collection spanned a wide range of genres, including classical, jazz, and Latin. The boys in Davies' care came to know her affectionately as "Sister Iggy."

Though Alpha's musical tradition dates back to the drum and fife corps of the 1880s, Sister Iggy's vision brought the academy's music program into a new era. The drum and fife corps became the Alpha Boys Band around 1910 after a donation of instruments from a

Roman Catholic Bishop on the island expanded the program. Before Sister Iggy's involvement, the program was confined to solely classical music. She expanded it to include jazz as well. She would sometimes even perform with the band on saxophone. It was her profound love of music that made the school such the incubator it became for some of the most prolific Jamaican musicians (Augustyn 17-19).

Historically, the Alpha Boys School had a strong connection with the military. For the musicians trained there, this meant two main career options upon graduation: to join the West Indian Regiment Band or embark on the jazz circuit. Prominent band leaders would scout the school when they needed to fill a seat, and sometimes pulled students out early. Some of the most influential pioneers in ska music were graduates of the Alpha Boys School. Among the most notable of these alumni were several members of the legendary Skatalites.

Donald Drummond, renowned trombonist and ska composer, was trained at the academy. He was among the students who pursued his musical career before graduation, leaving at the age of 16. Tommy McCook, Lloyd Knibb, and Johnny "Dizzy" Moore, and Lester Sterling were also Alpha alumni. The school's contribution to Jamaican popular music was paramount. Robert Witmer writes: "The organization and ongoing existence of a number of regimental and civic bands has made available a pool of trained and experienced instrumentalists for a variety of musical situations and activities over and above the ostensible functions of the bands themselves." (3)

The students at Alpha come from rough pasts. The school helped kids from troubled pasts escape their unfortunate situations and gave them direction to achieve success. From broken homes, poverty, and abuse, boys find refuge at Alpha. Beyond education, the school provided clothing, food, shelter, and guidance to its wayward sons and daughters. Its longstanding tradition continues on today. The still-active Alpha Academy strengthens the community, giving everything to its students who come out with a directive to give back.

Winston “Sparrow” Martin was an Alpha graduate himself, and became a bandmaster at the academy in 1989. Through his celebrated career in music, the legendary studio musician has worked with artists from Otis Redding to Bob Marley. He was trained as a drummer at Alpha, and he helps to continue the ska tradition there.

The Vere Johns Opportunity Hour

Vere Johns was born in Mandeville in 1893, later moving to Kingston where he first found employment in the postal service. He was sent overseas to fight in World War I, returning home to Kingston after four years of service. After working in the States for a decade, Johns returned to Kingston in 1939, the same year Sister Iggy began her service at the Alpha Boys School.

Around this time, the economy and tourism in Jamaica were in decline. Clubs and theaters had trouble filling their venues on off nights. Vere Johns was a manager for several theaters around Kingston. To bring in extra revenue, he started the variety show first at the Palace Theater. When it became wildly successful, the show was held at the Majestic, Carib, and Ward, Gaiety, Queens, and Ambassador theaters, which were all managed by Johns.

(Augustyn 20-21)

These shows would cost less than a shilling, and became hugely popular with the locals. Performances ranged from miscellaneous talent to instrumentalists, dancers, comedians, and singers. On Tuesdays and Thursdays every week, auditions were held. Winners were selected at the big shows by crowd endorsement -- those who received the loudest applause were named the winner. They were awarded a prize of two shillings, but more importantly, gained significant popular recognition and adoration. Johns also hosted a radio show, Opportunity Knocks, on which he promoted his opportunity hour and its winners.

The legacy of the Vere Johns Opportunity Hour boasts a tremendous list of now world-renowned artists and performers who got their start there. It presented some of the most influential and renowned vocalists who would go on to join the bands that developed through Alpha and the jazz circuit to make the mixture from which ska was to emerge. A short list of the performers who got their start on the Vere Johns Opportunity Hour includes Desmond Dekker, John Holt, Alton Ellis, Hortenise Ellis, Millie Small, Jimmy Cliff, Laurel Aitken, Derrick Morgan, and Bob Marley (and The Wailers) to name a few. The Jamaica Gleaner states of John's contribution:

It is quite reasonable to assume that without Johns' contribution, Jamaica's popular music might never have attained the heights it has today. The most unsung and underrated hero in Jamaican music, Johns single-handedly unearthed and exposed many aspiring artistes through the very famous 'Vere Johns Opportunity Hour' talent show which he organised, financed and produced, mainly during the 1940s and '50s. Many of these artistes, the list of which runs like an unending roll call, went on to become stars and megastars, locally and internationally. (Vere Johns, Jamaican Music's Truest Hero)

2.4 The Sound Systems and Dancehall Culture

The popularity of American music in Jamaica grew through radio, record exchange, and live performance. The demand for this sound was well established by the 1950s, but people in impoverished urban areas often couldn't afford admission to the local variety show or live performance, and couldn't afford records or radio sets of their own. Where the music was available, people would gather for a listen. As a communal gesture, this was encouraged when a technically apt few began rigging their radios and record players to large speaker systems. In the 1950s, some who took notice to the draw of the music sought to capitalize on it. As it did for Coxson Dodd's family grocery store, the peoples' tendency to gather in impoverished areas around a public source of music served as an effective means of promotion for local businesses -- especially beer and liquor sales. As time went on, the sound systems overthrew the popularity of the road band, as they were cheaper to hire, didn't need to take breaks, and were loud enough to cater to larger audiences.

The idea for electronically played music as a means for entertainment events was brought about largely by short-term agricultural migrant work. Immigration laws were relaxed in the U.S. due to labor shortages, and as a result, many Jamaican migrant workers took advantage of the shortage through short-term agricultural contracts, and during their time in the States, “they attended African American dance parties featuring recorded music and got the idea to try the same thing in Jamaica” (Kauppila 79). Though influenced by these dances, sound system tradition became distinguished in Jamaica. For the lower class, sound system dances became a wildly popular musical tradition -- a uniquely Jamaican phenomenon -- during the dancehall era.

Sound System Equipment and Venues

The sound system was an electronic means for mass entertainment. Pre-recorded music on gramophone or phonograph record was played on turntables that were hooked up through powerful amplifiers. These amplifiers were tasked with supplying power to uniquely massive speaker arrangements that were sometimes known as “houses of joy.” Garth White writes that “although Jamaica did not manufacture the equipment, ground-breaking electronic enthusiasts existed who were capable not only of repairing the amplifiers but also of building them. The assemblage of mega-wattage amplifiers, banks of speakers and record "libraries" in a unit that could move from place to place brought into being a "peculiar" Jamaican institution” (13-14). The record collection was a vital piece of equipment for a successful sound system. The proliferation of the system was coincident with the rise in popularity of American R&B in Jamaica. System operators would make frequent trips to the States to shop for prize American R&B hits to attract crowds, and the exclusivity of the songs played at each one was heavily guarded.

Though the sites for sound system events were referred to as dance halls, many were held outdoors. The Mecca of the sound system was Kingston, where the most impressive dance spaces were. Two of the biggest dance halls were Forrester's Hall and the adjacent King's Lawn. Other spaces included Jubilee Tile Gardens, Prosperity, Love Lane, Barbecue Lawn, and Metropolitan Hall, but the list goes on. Lower-class crowds flocked to these places in droves to dance to their favorite American R&B sounds (Hutton 18).

Sound System Icons

Though the sound systems originated during the 1930s and '40s, their period of greatest prominence was during the 1950s. The man credited with creating the first ever commercial sound system is Thomas Wong. His Tom the Great Sebastian also became the first sound system recognized as a true icon of the early 1950s. His musical efforts were not without economic incentive, as his system began at first as a means of promotion to attract business to his hardware store. His efforts ushered in the new era of Jamaican sound systems.

Soon to follow was Arthur Reid, who would come to be known as Duke Reid, the Trojan. Born in 1915, Reid was a police officer for ten years before making his way into the music business. He and his wife Lucille owned a liquor store, which they were able to build from Lucille's lottery winnings. He began hosting dances as a way to promote the store. Reid was a larger-than-life character and had a flamboyant presence at his dances. Heather Augustyn writes:

Reid was flashy and attracted attention everywhere he went. He frequently wore a crown on his head along with a red cape trimmed in ermine, bandoliers crisscrossing his chest, and two guns at his side, a shotgun on his left hip and a .45 on his right hip. Sometimes he even arrived at his dances being carried aloft on a gilded throne by his posse. He was known to fire his guns into the air at his shows in a display of his prowess as well as when he liked a song. He even occasionally played with a live grenade. (Augustyn 24)

Clement Seymore Dodd was born in 1932 in Kingston. In his early life he developed a love for jazz music working at his family's grocery store where they would play their radio set for the community. He was fascinated with artists like Fats Navarro, Charlie Parker, and Dizzie Gillespie. Dodd got his start in the sound system world as a selector for Duke Reid. Like many others at the time, he found seasonal employment as a migrant agricultural worker in the American South. During his trips, he shipped home boxes of records, a turntable, and speakers. With carpentry skills he learned from his father, he constructed his own sound system, Sir Coxson's Downbeat, and came to be known as Clement "Sir Coxson" Dodd.

Friend of Duke Reid Vincent "King" Edwards was inspired by the success of the Trojan, and began his own sound system in 1955. Edwards' system came to be known as the Giant, a fitting title, as he at one time had seven systems operating simultaneously. Reid, Dodd, and Edwards were known as the "big three," the most popular sounds around until Prince Buster joined their ranks later in the decade with his system the Voice Of The People. They would all go on to become innovative record producers as ska emerged from the growing Jamaican recording industry.

Two important terms worth special mention came out of the sound system age that informed later waves of ska. The "selector," as the name implies, was responsible for being in tune with the crowd and tasked with selecting the next song to play. His selections had to keep the party lively and the audience dancing. The "specials," before becoming the name of one of the most influential ska bands of second wave, was a term that referred to the records played on the sound systems. Also called exclusives, specials were 45 rpm or 7-inch vinyl singles unique to one sound system (Kauppila 79-81).

Count Machuki and Toasting

Before Count Machuki, the sound system dances were simply records played loudly for crowds, and they were used mostly for promotion. The final element that truly distinguished the Jamaican dancehall style of artistic expression through the sound system was the innovative styles of their DJs. Winston Cooper was drawn to the dancehall scene as a young man, first attracted to it at Thomas Wong's hardware store and became a devout follower of Tom the Great Sebastian. Later known as Count Machuki, he would go on to incorporate the interactive aspect of this era of dancehall music by establishing the practice of "toasting." Before Machuki, running a sound system meant little more than changing out records, but DJs like Winston Cooper took them to a new level (Hutton 22).

With the incorporation of the microphone, dancehall sound system music became a distinct style. DJs did much more than spin records. They were entertainers, hype men, and all-around showmen who would dance and communicate with the crowd to keep the atmosphere exciting. Long before rap or hip hop, they also imparted their own musical vocal styles over the music. This practice was known as "toasting." Sound system toasters would accent the rhythms of the songs with percussive vocal sounds like washboard-style tisking, peeps, some rhythmic gibberish, some nonsense rhyming, and much one-upmanship. They would also chant commands or catch phrases to the crowd. Count Machuki used to shout phrases "such as "dig it man, dig it!" and "come on come on" or "have some mercy on me baby," to encourage the crowd to dance" (Augustyn 22). Machuki got his start working for Tom the Great Sebastian, but he gained his greatest recognition through his later work with Coxsone's Downbeat. So beloved was his toasting, that when people would buy the records they heard him toast over, they returned them for disappointment that he was not on the recordings.

There were several influential elements of toasting. The vocal character of the rap-style rhyming became paramount in the following ska sound. The Specials and The Selecter of the British 2-Tone label incorporated toasting, as did (as the name suggests) The Toasters, who helped established ska music in America and continue to influence ska music. Such ska battle cries as “ska-ska-ska” and “pick it up, pick it up!” were rapid-fired over the sound system microphones by their toasters. In ska’s first wave, the most influential element of toasting was the vocal percussion. Ska vocals in these early days often included toasting sounds like “chik-a-took, chick-a-took,” “ch-ch, ch-ch” sounds like those of a locomotive, the hiccup-like “he-da, heda,” and grunting sounds. So incorporated was this vocal element, it is associated with ska as a stylistic parameter of the genre (Augustyn 22-23).

Competition and Rude Boys

Sound systems became competitive for not only business, but public adoration. A sort of local dominance was associated with who ran the most popular sound system. The economic incentive was the main incentive behind the proliferation of the sound systems because of admission price and more importantly alcohol sales. On the other side of the turntable, audiences praised the system playing the hottest and most exclusive tunes of the time. This led to vigorous -- sometimes violent -- competition between systems.

A big area of competition was exclusivity. DJs guarded their distinctive specials heavily, scratching the labels off of them and replacing those labels with their own. A famous example of this was “Coxsone’s Hop,” which was actually Willis Jackson’s recording of “Later for Alligator.” As a result, system operators were unable to identify their competition’s specials -- even if they took a look at the record as it spun on their turntable. In this competition, entourages had a certain allegiance to their favorite sound system. This led to the first incarnation of the rude boy, later appropriated to fit second and third wave ska.

The rude boy was a disenfranchised youth who did not agree with the social systems of which he was at the bottom. The name was derived from the behavior, or rather their social labeling. Rude boys were often mischievous criminals or thugs -- sometimes violent -- other times misrepresented in the media as “gangsters” and “hooligans.” They sometimes made their living illegally, especially in the drug trade. The rude society associated themselves through style as well as class and social philosophy. As Joseph Heathcott writes, “rude culture included ways of dressing (high-cuff pants, thin ties, suspenders, and boots), hairstyles (especially the martial flat top), rhythms of speech, in-group slang, alcohol consumption (Red Stripe beer), and attitudes and gestures that defied the authority of parents, teachers, ministers, and police” (193).

Gangs of rude boys came to associate themselves with particular sound systems, becoming a violent element of sound system competition. Aggressive henchmen from respective sound system entourages would raid competitors’ dances. They were even known to destroy their equipment, literally breaking the needles of their turntables. With the inception of rude culture, the picture of dancehall culture, informative and in many ways indicative of ensuing ska culture, is complete.

The Recording Industry Ignites In Jamaica

In the battle for exclusivity, sound system operators turned to a new supply for their specials. Sourcing American records for dances, though still a regular exercise, declined as a means for sound systems’ music supplies. Pushed by fierce competition and the emergence of rock n’ roll in the States, which was overwhelmingly rejected in Jamaica, record production surged locally in the late 1950s. Dance-goers yearned for the rhythm and blues sounds they’d come to adore. Operators began seeking out local talent to record specially purposed exclusives for their dances. Prior to this time, virtually no music was recorded on

the island for commercial use. As such, there were virtually no significantly operational recording studios in Kingston, where the sound system battles were in full swing.

However, there was one established studio in these early days that was crucial to the growth of local recording: Federal Records. Federal was started in the 1950s in Kingston by Ken Khouri and Greame Goodall. Khouri was established in music with his record label, Times Records, distributing calypso records. Goodall built and ran the studio, which had its own pressing facilities as well as recording facilities. Coxson Dodd, Duke Reid, and Prince Buster were the biggest sound system operators in the push for these recordings. In these formative days of recording, singers from the Vere Johns Opportunity Hour came together with musicians from Alpha Boys School and sound system operators to make the mix of people who would create ska. It is at this time the music began to shift.

Bands were assembled to pump out songs as quickly as possible, songs used exclusively for the sound systems. As such, the music didn't have much opportunity to develop, and these recordings had little character to distinguish them from earlier American R&B tunes. They did, however, have enough uniqueness to be classified as a dancehall style, a genre which is a uniquely Jamaican form of rhythm and blues and was a final predecessor to ska. Paul Kauppila writes: "At first this music was virtually indistinguishable from American R&B... This pre-ska style is sometimes referred to as "shuffle," "boogie woogie," "Jamaican blues," or "Jamaican R&B." Although often considered to be merely an early form of ska, Jamaican R&B deserves to be considered a distinct form of its own" (84).

3. Ska's First Wave Breaks

With the recording industry growing in to support the dancehall scene, Jamaican R&B began to grow as well. It is at this time the music begins to shift, taking on a new character through the unique blend of backgrounds encompassed by the musicians, producers, and

vocalists involved in Jamaica's popular music traditions. With all of the necessary people united through the sound system, the late 1950s finally saw the development of ska.

Ska Producers and Studios

In these years, the problem with dancehall productions was that they were rushed. Recordings were more a utility for getting a new special onto the turntable as quickly as possible than they were a creative artistic endeavor. Bands and vocalists were thrown together and rushed through the studio. Because the live element and feel of these studio performances was so important, it was not a high priority to polish songs and performances. This is why Jamaican R&B was just that and did not ultimately develop into ska until the 1960s. The incubators of this transition were the studios established by sound system operators.

Once the American supply of R&B began to wane with the growing popularity of rock n' roll, Federal Records became crowded with sound system operators bringing bands in to record their specials. With such an overwhelming demand, some of these producers started their own studios to records their exclusives. In these studios, house bands were more concrete, and they had more time with the artists to craft their recordings. The two biggest studios were founded by the two biggest sound system operators, Coxsone Dodd and Duke Reid. In support of his label, Duke Reid built his own studio, Treasure Isle, above his liquor store of the same name. To remain competitive, Coxsone Dodd began recording in his own studio space, known as Studio One, in 1961.

This event was also fueled by competition. At this time, record production was becoming a commercial endeavor in its own right, as opposed to the earlier utilitarian practice of pumping out records for sound system use. Once the records became a

commodity themselves, more effort was put into studio performance as well as tonal quality.

As Dodd put it in an interview:

“...we could spend more time putting the records, the sounds, together so you would get a perfect record. When you hire a studio, you kinda watchin’ the clock on the wall and sometime you accept a take just because your time is running out. But when you have your own studio, you know, you try to get perfect sound and stick to that” (Baker).

Though their studios became the most significant of the ska era, Dodd and Reid were not the only producers in town. The same pool of ska musicians and singers in Kingston worked with several producers and hopped studios to support a viable income. Young hopefuls would crowd around the studios hoping to get an audition and establish themselves as entertainers. If they were fortunate enough to make an impression, they were brought in by producers to sing with the studio bands. Most producers, with such a high demand for their work, were exploitative of their artists and musicians. So many were looking for a shot in the music business, they were able to take advantage of the hopefuls they produced. In fact, for most of these early recordings, no royalties were paid to the bands or the singers.

Cecil Bustamante Campbell, or Prince Buster, was another producer who ran a label under the same name as his system, The Voice Of The People. He got his start in music as a henchman for Coxsone’s Downbeat. He was a mischievous thug and once broke the needle off of Duke Reid’s turntable at a dance. Federal Records banned him from using their facilities for trying to constantly dodge his payments. During his career, he made enemies of most, but he recorded with important bands like The Skatalites. Mostly producing his own songs, some of his greatest contributions to ska are the iconic hits of “Madness,” “Al Capone,” and “One Step Beyond.” Leslie Kong was another influential producer. He is credited with discovering a young Jimmy Cliff, and in 1962 he gave the then-unknown Bob Marley his start, producing Marley’s first two songs “One Cup Of Coffee” and “Judge Not” (Augustyn 38-40).

As was the case with Prince Buster, most producers were a sort of hustlers. One beloved exception to the rule was Justin Yap, who ran the Top Deck label with his brother Duke. Yap always paid his performers fairly in cash, usually more than his competition. He was introduced to The Skatalites by Coxsone Dodd's assistant, Allan "Bim Bim" Scott, who recommended he record them. At Studio One, during a famous all-night session in 1964, he recorded some of their greatest work, written by Don Drummond. His obituary reads:

When musicians worked for me, they didn't have to come back the next day. I never give them cheque, always cash - in an envelope, the precise amount, not a penny short," he said. Indeed, in a field notorious for one-off deals and quickie releases, Yap wasn't afraid to pay Jamaican musicians more than his competitors and then make the most of the extra takes. This visionary outlook undoubtedly contributed to the seminal nature of the recordings he financed and issued on his label Top Deck... In November 1964, having secured the services of the group for one night by paying them twice as much as the going rate, Justin Yap supervised a marathon 18-hour session which yielded Ska-Boo-Da-Ba, arguably the definitive ska album, combining original compositions (from various Skatalites and Yap himself) as well as instrumental versions of standards (Duke Ellington's "Caravan" syncopated in a reworking entitled "Ska-Ra-Van", for instance). (Perrone 6)

3.2 The Skatalites

At the height of ska music, there was no band in Jamaica more prolific than The Skatalites. They are credited as the founders of ska as a genre in its own right, making the final stylistic push that would distinguish the new form from Jamaican R&B. The musicians themselves recorded together in studios throughout the dancehall era and became to Coxsone Dodd's Studio One what the Funk Brothers were to Motown. Though not exclusively contracted as the studio band there, their first work together was with Dodd. The band also worked with such producers as Duke Reid, Prince Buster, Justin Yap, Vincent "King" Edwards, Leslie Kong, and Vincent "Randy Chin" to name a few. Their studio work also includes a massive list of artists for whom they performed backing music, among whom were Alton Ellis, Toots and the Maytals, Prince Buster, Jimmy Cliff, Ken Boothe, and Bob Marley and The Wailers (simply The Wailers at the time). Many of these artists were young

hopefuls whose raw talent as entertainers had little or no formal background. Garth White

writes:

The story goes that The Skatalites members were quite sharp even if at times they could be indulgent with the young, aspiring performers. If a group like the Wailers or the Gaylads... or any of the young hopefuls persistently made mistakes -- a wrong note, a missed cue for example -- one of the band members might just wryly comment that "... this tune sound like an instrumental man." That would be the signal for the group to go out side the studio, "polish up" and return. (White 18)

The group's original lineup consisted of band leader Tommy McCook on tenor saxophone, trombone virtuoso Don Drummond, Lester Sterling on alto saxophone, and Johnny "Dizzy" Moore on trumpet, Roland Alphonso on tenor saxophone, Jerome "Jah Jerry" Haynes on guitar, Donat Roy "Jackie" Mittoo on piano, Lloyd Brevett on bass, Lloyd Knibb on Drums, and vocalists Doreen Shaffer, Jackie Opel, Tony DeCosta, and Lord Tanamo. Although the band had resident vocalists and recorded with numerous singers, their original works were dominantly instrumental. Other musicians shuffled in and out of the group, including trumpeters Oswald "Baba" Brooks and Rupert Dillon, guitarists Harold McKenzie, Lyn Taitt, and Ernest Ranglin, and drum legend Arkland "Drumbago" Parks to name a few. The entirety of The Skatalites' horn section was comprised of Alpha Academy graduates. The members had known each other and jammed together for years before claiming their name in 1964, when they began performing live and recording their own original material. Although Tommy McCook led the group, Don Drummond was often confused as bandleader. "He was not only The Skatalites' busiest composer, but the most prolific in all of ska, with at least two hundred tunes to his name by 1965" (Hickling 21).

Although the members of the band had played together for years -- some of them since their tutelage at Alpha Academy as teenagers -- The Skatalites were only officially together as a band from 1964 to 1965, nearly fifteen months. In this short time, the band performed live all over Jamaica, wrote and performed behind a multitude of recording artists, and developed an extensive library of their own original works. Their hit song "Guns Of

Navarone” posthumously reached the top ten in Britain after the band parted ways, becoming one of the first ska songs to achieve success outside of Jamaica.

They disbanded tragically after such a short term when Don Drummond was jailed for murdering his girlfriend. The Skatalite’s contribution to ska music is unmatched, and their influence continues to survive their original lineup of musical revolutionaries today -- half a century later. After an eighteen-year hiatus, the band reunited in 1983, and continues to tour world-wide today. Though most of the original members have sadly passed away, Lester Sterling and Doreen Shaffer have continued on throughout The Skatalites’ numerous lineup changes over the years (Hickling 20-21).

3.3 Musical Characteristics

Ska’s musical style was the unique product of a diverse sonic melting pot. Exactly when it became distinguished enough to claim its own title as a genre is unclear, but by 1962, the genre was in full swing and remained the primary Jamaican sound until 1966. As Paul Kauppila describes: “The identity of the first ska record is a matter of debate as well. Claims have been made for "Easy Snappin'" by Theophilus Beckford, "Shufflin' Jug," by Clue J and his Blues Blasters, "Humpty Dumpty," by Eric “Monty” Morris, and “Fat Man,” by Derrick Morgan” (88). Although its exact beginning may be unclear, its musical style is clearly distinct.

The term “ska” is literally descriptive of the genre’s defining trait. That trait is heavy emphasis on the offbeat, or the after beat. It was mainly supported with guitar, piano, and sometimes “rhythm horn” staccato accentuation. This was dubbed the “ska.” Much like bebop did in America, the genre’s name came from the onomatopoeic description of its sound. The horn section in ska follows a theme and variation style characteristic of the jazz forms in which the genre’s top musicians at the time were trained. During verse sections, it

was common to have horn accompaniment serve the rhythmic function of accenting the offbeat along with the guitar and piano. The bass generally outlined chord progressions with arpeggiated walking lines similar to jazz music at the time.

The common drum pattern in first wave ska represents a kind of stylistic transition. Identification of this pattern is incomplete without mention of the contribution of Count Ossie. Count Ossie was a prominent Burru drummer at the time and a prominent figure in the community of musicians who would come to invent the new sound. A significant revivalist figure of the time, he was of great importance in the influence of African rhythm on the ska sound. Under his influence, Lloyd Knibb of The Skatalites was the main inventor of ska's distinct drumming style. The transition of the drum pattern in first wave ska is between the standard R&B shuffle pattern and the one-drop beat.

Although the one-drop beat did not become completely defined until rocksteady, there can be observed a clear movement towards it in ska. The one-drop pattern consists of (usually open) hi-hat notation on every eighth note, with a closed hi-hat, kick, and snare rim click accent landing together on the second and fourth beats of each measure in standard time. During the hey-day of ska's first wave, this pattern was to take form. The jazz-oriented one-drop was often busier, with sporadic and varying accentuation, but it had a one-drop orientation at its core. Ska songs of this era had a one-drop rhythm --sometimes standard, other times busier -- but always at the core of the genre.

Overall, the revivalist-inspired lack of accentuation on the first and third downbeats of a measure gives ska a buoyant feel. These strong beats, which would normally be anchored with a kick accent in R&B, were obscured by the second and fourth downbeats' pronunciation and constant accentuation of the offbeat. The end result was that "a unique musical mixture was produced that combined the simplicity and danceable quality of the ska rhythm with the improvisational complexity of jazz" (Kauppila 87).

Reflection of the Time

Ska's upbeat style was not only for dancing, but was also reflective of the historical period in Jamaica. In 1962, as ska was rising to its greatest height, Jamaica gained independence from Britain. There was a profound nationalism permeating the island, as the general mood of the time was hopeful. Plagued with scarce employment and poverty, there was a high-spirited atmosphere for the prospect of positive change. Ska was a reflection of the spirit of independence. As Garth White explains, "by the time of The Skatalites, still rated as the best aggregation ever, Jamaica had gained independence and there was a mood of optimism in the air. One can feel the buoyancy and energy reflected in the music. It wasn't that you did not have your melancholy songs or incipient protest songs but, generally, in the music there was a sense of gaiety" (White 18).

3.4 The Origins of Ska: the Word

The way that ska came to be the definitive term for this new style of music in the early 1960s is largely debated. There are several origin stories, but none of them is clearly the one true story. The first, and one of the most agreed-upon origins, is credited to Cluett Johnson. Johnson is responsible for one of the most important dancehall bands, Clue J. and the Blues Blasters. He was known for his slang term "skavoovie." He would regularly greet people with the term. According to Skatalites bass player Lloyd Brevett, he used to come into the studio and greet the band, saying "Wha-up, Skavoovie?" Guitarist Earnest Ranglin is credited with coining the term by producer Bunny Lee, but denies the claim, crediting other studio musicians at the time as a collective.

Prince Buster attempts to claim ownership of the term as an abbreviation of "scatter." This was a recommendation to other sound system operators of the time, Buster's boastful

style of suggesting they get out of his way. According to Jackie Mittoo, the term was adapted from Byron Lee's common phrase "Staya Staya." Some say that ska was Coxsone Dodd's onomatopoeic way of describing the sound that he wanted from the guitar on a recording. Lester Sterling claims that as early as 1958, he was nicknamed "Ska" Sterling for the percussive sound of his alto saxophone when he would accompany guitar and piano accentuation of the off-beat (Kauppila 99). Whoever might have truly been the first to coin the term may never become clear. The one thing that is most apparent is that the main function of the term was describing the off-beat accentuation that defined the music.

3.5 The Music of the People Goes International

When it first came to be, ska was a music of the people. The sound was exclusively Jamaican, with most of its popular figures and adoring fans rising out of the impoverished shanty-town life of urban Kingston. Once it caught on as a nationally popular and commercially viable musical standard, the genre expanded in much the same way the Jamaican jazz era did. There was a stratification of ska music into uptown and downtown sounds. The same social and musical implications that divided dancehall music into these two classes were later applied to ska.

Downtown bands were those of the lower-class. Their sound was more influenced by R&B and mento, with a jazz influence conveyed through jazz-trained musicians. The uptown sound had a high-society connotation to it, and represented more of a big band jazz influence than downtown ska. This juxtaposition can be well-represented in comparison of The Skatalites to Byron Lee and the Dragonaires. Once ska had become cemented as a legitimate genre, it is only natural progression that an interest in the sound would spark outside Jamaica. It was primarily the uptown sound that initially broke internationally. Two prominent examples of ska's early success outside the country were Chris Blackwell's "My Boy

Lollipop” and Byron Lee and the Dragonaires’ performance at the New York World’s Fair in 1964. Though the downtown sound was more true to ska’s roots as a music of the disenfranchised lower class, the polished uptown sound was more presentable in Jamaica’s push to promote tourism. Though it may not have been in the true spirit of the genre, uptown ska’s popularity did help pave the way for the proliferation of true ska music in coming years (Augustyn 46-50).

Chris Blackwell and “My Boy Lollipop”

Born in London in 1937, Chris Blackwell’s family moved to Jamaica where he spent his childhood until the age of eight. It was at this time he returned to the U.K. where he attended a Catholic boarding school. He returned to Jamaica in 1955, turning down training to be an accountant to pursue his ambitions of becoming a professional gambler. He was introduced to the music business while working at the Half Moon Hotel in Montego Bay, an establishment owned by his cousins. Blackwell organized an album recording of hotel employee Lance Hayward, a blind Bermudan jazz pianist, in 1959. To get the cover design printed, he went to New York where he had spent six months earlier that year. During these trips, he bought records to sell to the sound system operators of the time, his connection to whom would lead him further into music production. He founded Island Records in Kingston 1960.

Blackwell’s acclimation to Jamaican and English cultural climates of the time made him a talented mediator between the two. During this period, the racial climate in England was hostile. Much like they did in America, many migrant workers from the island found seasonal work in Britain after World War II. In 1962, however, there was legislation passed in the British government which placed firm restrictions on this migration. Being of a white and privileged English background and having established himself in Jamaica’s downtown

music community, Blackwell had a unique advantage in presenting ska to England.

Instrumental to the success of this introduction was Millie Small.

Millie Small had a distinctive, high-pitched voice. After emerging victorious from an installment of the Vere Johns Opportunity Hour, she recorded several duets for Coxsone Dodd's Studio One label prior to her work with Blackwell, and as such was well established in the ska community. Though "My Boy Lollipop" wasn't her first work with Blackwell, it would come to be one of her most significant works with him -- the most significant regarding Jamaican ska's crossover to England. Her image was strongly emphasized as an exotic, innocent country girl with a winning smile. However, due to the rampant racism in the country at the time, she was schooled in speech to smother her Jamaican patois so as not to appear *too* exotic. In 1963, Blackwell brought her to England to record with British blues band called the Five Dimensions. Guitarist Earnest Ranglin was brought over to produce the song (Stratton 445-458).

"My Boy Lollipop" was originally released in 1956, sung by Barbie Gaye. The song was atypically popular among sound system dance-goers, as its singer was not of African descent. When Blackwell sold records to sound system operators, he would make a copy of the songs on a reel-to-reel tape. When he and Small were in England, he stumbled upon Gaye's original recording of the song while searching through his archives for a song that would suit her. It was a fortunate choice, as Small's version went on to achieve massive success and reached number two on the British charts in 1964. Of the carefully crafted crossover creation, Jon Stratton writes:

The success of Millie's version of "My Boy Lollipop" lay in Blackwell's ability to move across cultures; to take a song located in African-American rhythm and blues, match it with a Jamaican singer with a winning smile and a voice that sounded cute to British listeners, and back her with an English rhythm and blues group playing ska arranged by a black Jamaican. Blackwell's Jewish and Irish background, as I have argued, made him an outsider in both the white colonial and black societies of Jamaica. This background, reinforced by his colonial heritage, also made him an outsider in English society. He was again, for more obvious reasons, an outsider in African-American culture. At the same time, this very outsider experience enabled Blackwell to function as a cultural mediator. He was able to bring his knowledge of all these cultures together to

produce a track that synthesized attributes of each of them in such a way as to produce a piece of music that appealed to a white, British audience—and, it should be added, not only a British audience. Millie's version of “My Boy Lollipop,” with its whitening of black African-American and Jamaican sounds, was also bought by white American teenagers, climbing to number two on the American pop chart. (Stratton 458-459)

Uptown Sound at the New York World's Fair

At the time, downtown music was considered edgy when it came to international distribution. Being that tourism was of such crucial importance to the Jamaican economy, promoting to the island was of great importance. Edward Seaga, who would later go on to become prime minister of Jamaica, chose Byron Lee and the Dragonaires to represent the country musically at the World's Fair. Seaga was Jamaica's minister of culture at the time, previously employed as the manager of Byron Lee's group. The atmosphere surrounding the presentation of ska at the fair was exceedingly incongruent with the downtown attitude to from which it came. Similarly to “My Boy Lollipop,” this presentation of ska was whitewashed to appeal to a high-class American audience. Because Seaga's goal was to market the country as a place for tourism, this presentation was not without a fair amount of necessity. That said, it was misrepresentative of the genre's true nature as a working class creation. Heather Augustyn writes:

The Skatalites were the undisputed leaders of ska, the most talented group of musicians the island had or has ever seen... Byron Lee was an uptown band that played ska, but not with the soul and vigor of The Skatalites. Even though The Skatalites were more popular, they were downtown musicians known for ganja smoking and all kinds of debauchery. The Skatalites also associated with the Rastafari, a people ostracized and persecuted by the government and establishment. Byron Lee had no dreadlocks, was not dark skinned, and was upper class... As a result, ska, as it was presented at the World's Fair, was as far from the downtown musicians who created the sound as possible... Instead, these events were sophisticated, stylish, and socially exclusive. (Augustyn 50)

4. Ska's Decline

Although ska became the most powerful force of Jamaican popular music throughout the first half of the 1960s, it rapidly fell to the wayside at the turn of the decade. It was the end of the ska era, as Jamaican popular music shifted to rocksteady.

The Tragic Loss of an Icon

One devastating incident that led to ska's wane in popularity was the loss of Don Drummond. Drummond was one of the most beloved and celebrated composers and performers in the genre. The trombone virtuoso of The Skatalites and Alpha alumnus struggled for years with mental illness. He was schizophrenic, often behaving erratically. Seeking treatment at Bellvue Mental Hospital for years, he received harsh electro-shock treatment and heavy sedative medications. On New Year's Day of 1965, Drummond stabbed his girlfriend, Anita Mahfood, to death. He was committed to Bellvue, where he died on May 6, 1969. He was 37 years old. With the loss of Drummond came the loss of the genre's and the nation's most profoundly innovative group. The Skatalites would play their last show in August that same year before dissolving (Hickling 21).

Too Hot To Dance

The most direct cause for ska's decline came in the summer of 1966. Interestingly enough, the weather was possibly the most significant reason for the creation of rocksteady. That summer, the country underwent a sweltering heat wave. It was literally, and quite simply, too hot to dance. The up-tempo nature of ska wasn't working at the dance halls, so the producers and musicians slowed it down to cool off the suffocating dance-goers. The result was that "a new genre, rocksteady, took over, featuring relaxed rhythm, less brass, and more vocals" (Augustyn 54).

4.1 Rocksteady Beat: The New Sound of a Nation

The final precursor to reggae is rocksteady. To an extent, it is in fact a slower-tempo interpretation of ska, but its definition exceeds its speed. Since tempo was not the only factor (though a significant contribution) that determined the music's shift with enough significance

to warrant a declaration of a new genre. There had always been slow ska songs, and later on there would come to be up-tempo rocksteady songs. The rocksteady era roughly spanned the period from 1966 to '68. Its departure from ska is marked by this short historical period, its tone and message, and its varied musical character.

As was the case with ska, rocksteady music was a reflection of the times in Jamaica. The promise of prosperity after independence did not hold true as the people had hoped. When the rocksteady era came about, the country was still plagued with unemployment and poverty. As such, the tone of rocksteady's message and musical style experienced a shift from those of ska. Now that the dancing was more subdued in conjunction with the sound, people would rock steadily to the beat. Though the origin of the term is obscure, this was at the core of its meaning. The lyrics were more prevalent as a result of the common absence of a horn section, which would have carried the main melody. Now, that responsibility was shouldered by the vocalist.

With the economic troubles of urban Kingston, rude culture was increasing. Songs of this era took on messages more serious than the earlier R&B- and jazz-oriented ska. Lyrical content shifted from the early optimism following Jamaican independence to more socially conscious subject matter. They addressed current issues of the prevailing rude boy culture and conveyed escapist fantasy through sweetly-sung duets and otherwise romantic themes. Songs like "Cool Off Rudies" by Derrick Morgan and "A Message To You, Rudy" by Dandy Livingstone were cautionary pleas for peace and calm among increasingly aggressive crowds. On the other hand, ballads like "Teardrops Falling" by The Versatiles and "You're Gonna Need Me" by Errol Dunkley are representative of the softer, more romantic themes of rocksteady music.

The attitude of the country and the music marked a return toward revivalist music in the late 1960s. Rastafarianism had been widely persecuted, but at this time was growing and

gaining acceptance. This movement is representative of the early formation of reggae. What it meant for the musical style was an increase in revivalist influence. The big band jazz element of ska declined, as rhythms became less busy. The guitar and keyboards still accented the offbeat similarly, but were slowed down. The one drop drum pattern was simplified and better distinguished from the R&B shuffling style. Bass patterns were also simplified, with a more relaxed feel and more dead space. On occasions when there was horn accompaniment, they rarely played the offbeat rhythm horn pattern. Horn accentuation in rocksteady was more akin to that of the small sections in American soul music at the time. Vocal styles were also more soulful and reminiscent of those characteristic of revivalist musical traditions. As McCarthy writes, “even though rocksteady emulates many African American techniques, these influences are mostly surface characteristics; the deeper, overall aesthetic and rhythmic orientation is much more neo-African than in ska” (222).

5. Conclusion

The first wave of ska music, similarly to the following two, can be easily misread as a passing fad. In Jamaica, ska’s reign as the premier popular music of the island only lasted roughly half of a decade from its definition to rocksteady’s overthrowing it as the next big thing. Although the genre’s first wave only reigned for a short time, its meaning has continued unchanged through two succeeding resurgences in radically varying historical and national contexts. Its greatest significance lies in its empowerment. A true music of the people, this extraordinary genre has united the disenfranchised through collective identity.

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