

Bob Marley and the Wailers Survival Island

The wheel has come the full circle. After the blandness of *Kaya* and the stodginess of *Babylon By Bus*, Bob Marley is hard again.

Survival is the result of Marley's pilgrimage to Ethiopia, his spiritual homeland. For this reason, those expecting more paeans to the joys of herb and skank should approach this set with caution. It's as danceable as any Wailers record, but that's not where the strength of *Survival* lies. It is an angry work, containing Marley's strongest political statements to date.

Survival is deceptive at first. Its melodies don't have the oppressive feel of those on *Natty Dread* or *Rastaman Vibration*, relying less on minor chords and more on lyrical content to create an air of menace, frustration or rage. But there's blood in every word.

The opening track, "So Much Trouble", is a mere scene-setter, a lightweight dancer with a familiar message:

"You see men sailing on their ego trips, blast off on their spaceship. Million miles from reality, no care for you, no care for me."

"Zimbabwe" dives right into the heart of the matter, taking up the cudgel, or the rifle, in the struggle for liberation:

"Every man gotta right to decide his own destiny, and in this judgment there is no partiality. So arm in arm, with arms we will fight this little struggle, 'cause that's the only way we can overcome our little trouble."

"Top Rankin" covers no new ground, merely repeating well-worn accusations over the sort of arrangement The Wailers can play in their sleep.

"Babylon System" redresses the balance, raising an outraged clenched fist. It utilises the more traditional "bundu" rhythm, a slow shuffle beat, with a beguiling melody and soaring chorus. The lyrics put a very effective sting in the tail:

"Babylon System is the vampire, sucking the children day by day. Building church and university, deceiving the people continually. Me say them graduating thieves and murderers..."

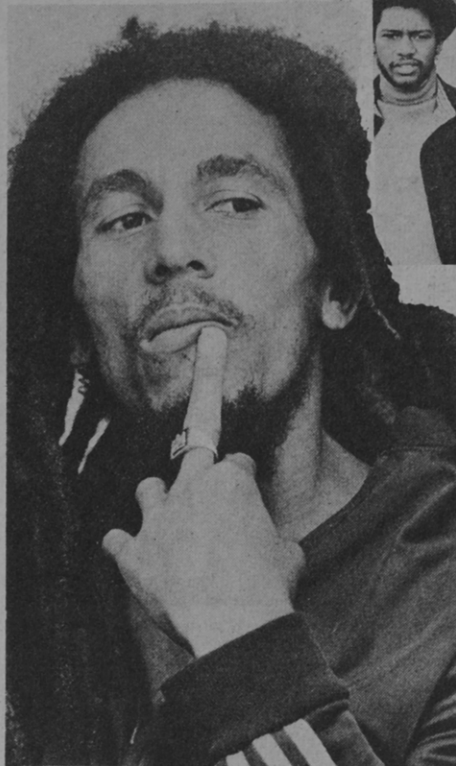
The title track reflects a spirit that has refused to lay down and die, in the face of centuries of adversity, a determination to establish a truly "black" identity and consciousness, despite reactionaries who vilify, and even liberals who patronise:

"How can you be sitting there, telling me that you are, when everytime I look around, the people suffer in suffering everywhere. We're the survivors, like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Thrown in the fire but never get burn."

"One Drop" makes you realise why Marley is so revered. His voice is one of the finest emotive instruments in music today, black or white. His statements are never glib or clichéd, but deeply felt and well considered.

"Ambush" is Marley's first and probably last

TOUGH AGAIN!



reference to the incident at his home, when he, his wife and his manager, Don Taylor, were shot and badly wounded by unknown gunmen. Some say putting it into a song is a foolhardy, provocative move, but Marley is unafraid:

"We're not ignorant, I mean it, and they just could not touch us. Through the powers of the Most High, we keep on surfacing..."

"Africa Unite" is an anthem for the black nations to follow a common cause, while the closer, "Wake Up And Live", is another skanker which is bound to become a live crowd pleaser.

Survival will not please everybody. Marley gave that up after *Natty Dread* because he had more important things to say. He does not appeal to the white man to understand the black man; if he doesn't now, he never will. "We are what we are, and that's the way it's going to be," he says in "Babylon System".

This album is a rallying call to the black man, a proclamation of oneness. You may not find all of Marley's views agreeable, but his role as the major driving force behind Third World culture is beyond doubt.

Duncan Campbell.



Reggae Roundup

Recently, there has been a very healthy upsurge in the amount of reggae released in this country. In the hope of further fostering this, *Rip It Up* will be running a round-up of the latest crop of reggae albums as they come to hand.

Marley, who stands alone, has already been reviewed elsewhere. Top of this list, but by no means an also-ran, is *Tribute To The Martyrs* (Island), the second album by Birmingham band **Steel Pulse**. The martyrs in this case are Paul Bogle, George Jackson, Martin Luther King, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, Haile Selassie and Steve Biko. Their faces, carved in a mountainside at Mount Rushmore, are the centrepiece of a beautiful cover picture. The contents are no less stunning.

Tribute surpasses its predecessor, the sublime *Handsworth Revolution*, in immediacy and vigour. The opener, "Unseen Guest", is for Bogle, hanged in 1865 for trying to improve the political status of the Jamaican people. Jah Jah watch over I. Evil, what you gonna do?

"Jah Pickney (Rock Against Racism)" speaks for itself, and the title track features a chilling recital of the way some of the martyrs met their end. Which part dem gone, which part dem deh...

Elsewhere, stones are cast for Jackson and Biko, blasphemers are cast into the fires, and the joys are extolled of dancing to the sound system DJ's.

David Hinds confirms that as a vocalist he is second only to Marley, and Karl Pitterson's production, as always, is exemplary. Mean, moving, magnificent music.

Third World have been in action since 1973, and each of their four albums has plotted new courses, the later ones especially forging new links with American R&B rhythms, to the stage where their most recent work has taken on an almost disco feel. This is not to belittle their achievements, since their later work has, to these ears, been the most satisfying.

Up for grabs here are their first album *Third World*, the follow-up *96 Degrees In The Shade*, and their latest product *The Story's Been Told*

(Island). The first album is a sombre affair, starting on the cover, showing a woman with her head downcast in defeat and resignation. The covers of each of the albums carry on a concept. The first album features a depressingly accurate reading of Winston Rodney's "Slavery Days", and while worthy for "Sun Don't Shine" and "Freedom Song", its interest is more of a historical nature.

It's hard to believe that its successor, *96 Degrees*, was made by the same band. It brims over with self-confidence, influences from other cultures, mainly western, are starting to intrude, and the production and arrangements are far more adventurous. *96 Degrees* also introduces the massed vocal harmonies for which Third World have become known.

It's still subdued, compared to its successor, *Journey to Addis*, reviewed earlier this year, but an air of optimism prevails, as a solution has been found. The cover shows a man, again with head bowed in submission, but surrounded by craftwork, things of beauty and symbols of his culture.

The band's most popular release, according to one overseas reggae dealer, the standout tracks being "Jah Glory", "Human Market Place" and "Rhythm Of Life."

A very different band is heard on *The Story's Been Told*. Bunny "Rugs" Clarke, who joined on the *96 Degrees* set is a far more American vocalist than the man he replaced, Milton Hamilton. The crossover sound has been completed. The cover shows the children of Babylon arriving on the shores of Addis, and the album has a very "up" feel, epitomised in the sheer elation of "Having A Party". Third World are now making the most accessible music to come out of JA.

The Heptones' *Night Food* is a re-release, which was snapped up by enthusiasts the first time around, and is bound to get the same reception again.

Leroy Sibley, Earl Morgan and Barry Llewellyn have been singing together since their voices broke, and it shows in the precision of their work.

If Sibley has become infatuated with Jah, it didn't show in this set, recorded in 1976. That's not to say he's without a conscience. There's plenty of evidence on tracks like "Deceivers" and the classic "Book Of Rules".

The only non-original is a worthy rendition of the Four Tops' "Baby I Need Your Lovin'".

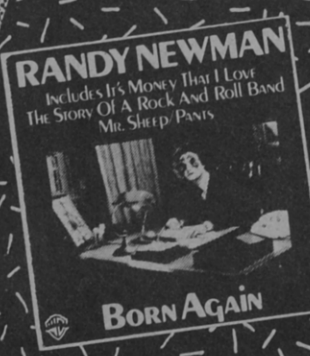
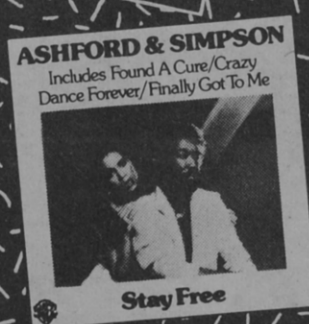
The Gladiators, Albert Griffiths, Clinton Fearon and Dallimore Sutherland, have been recording since 1967, and have released two superb records, *Trenchtown Mixup* and *Proverbial Reggae*, since signing to Virgin in 1976. *Naturality* (Front Line) continues this heritage, refining their songwriting, with numbers like "Write To Me" and "Nyabingi Marching On" showing off their lovely harmonies to the best advantage. Marley's "Exodus" is also given reverent treatment.

Skank till your ankles break.

Duncan Campbell

LASH OUT!

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