

It Takes

Here

BUNNY WALLER'S BLACKHEART MAN AND OTHERS AMONGSS CLASSICS ARE BE AVAILABLE DIGITALLY FOR THE FIRST TIME. JOHN MASOURI TELLS THE LEGEND HE FIRST ENCOUNTERED 22 AGO.



for keeping people on the right track and making them feel proud of themselves.

"They were *records* in the fullest sense," he explains, "they weren't just recordings, like this disposable stuff you listen to for a minute or two and then forget about. The stuff we did back then is eternal. But my own work is coming from The Wailers, because even before I embarked on my solo career, I was being trained and prepared for an album like *Blackheart Man*. If you notice, The Wailers never sang any songs with racism in them or anything suggesting any kind of superiority or inferiority complex. We never tried to put down people or put up people. The Wailers made songs for different moments and attitudes among people, so I try and stay within those same areas and teach people to remain conscious and aware of things that are significant. That's why I believe that everything we did as Wailers has been good. There were never bad situations between us. Even when we separated, you'd still hear good things coming from The Wailers so I'm satisfied with all that has been achieved and I'm also satisfied in knowing that I, Bunny

barely make out a word he'd said. It was my first lesson in "the show must go on," and a valuable one.

Two decades later and we're back where we started, except this time we're due to speak about his licensing deal with digital distributors Zojak, who've reissued a special edition of *Blackheart Man* complete with bonus tracks, and will be making his entire output available for download over the coming months. This is a significant development, and underlines just how far the new medium's come in recent times.

By his own admission, *Blackheart Man* is Bunny's piece de resistance, and deserving of a place alongside other seminal seventies albums by the likes of Dylan, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, Curtis Mayfield and Bob Marley. We could add a few more names to that list except it's an elite group we're talking about – one responsible for landmark releases that redefined their genre, and still make essential listening today.

"I've made other albums that are good in certain aspects, but *Blackheart Man* was the first and as we all know, the first cut is the deepest," he says. "There are a lot of people who feel the same way about it too, because everywhere I go in the world people approach me thanking me for that album. Some people tell me it's changed their lives, and that listening to it has made them better people."

Blackheart Man tells of the Rastafarians' journey, and dates from a time [1976] when relatively little was known of the faith outside of Jamaica. Bunny calls it "a phenomenon" and takes pride in how it's helped present Rastafari in a good light, despite so much negative media attention.

"Rastafarians have been ridiculed, they've been abused and accused of doing all kinds of religious misdeeds," he snarls. "For instance, a lot of people have yet to come to terms with the fact that His Imperial Majesty is the supreme power of all creation, even though there's people of every race serving Emperor Haile Selassie I."

Bunny says albums like *Blackheart Man* were responsible

Bunny Wailer is the only surviving member of The Wailers' vocal trio, which makes him reggae royalty in anyone's book. It's his voice

soaring alongside those of Bob Marley and Peter Tosh on ska sides recorded at Studio One back in the sixties, as well as sessions produced by Lee "Scratch" Perry that yielded unforgettable early versions of songs like *Dreamland*, *Kaya*, *Sun Is Shining* and *Duppy Conqueror*. Bunny was also there for the *Catch A Fire* and *Burnin'* albums, released by Island, but then opted from touring and signed a solo deal that resulted in one of the greatest reggae sets of all time: *Blackheart Man* – more of which later.

In recent years, he's toured with Ziggy and Stephen Marley and recorded with their brother Damian, in-between releasing the occasional album of his own and starring [both as orator and performer] in Jerome

Laperrousaz's film *Made In Jamaica*. Halfway through that movie, Bunny sings *I Shot The Sheriff* dressed in a cowboy outfit. The reggae faithful were stunned, but then he's hardly a stranger to controversy. Last year he made a notable appearance at the Rototum Festival in Italy, where he clashed with Chris Blackwell at a Reggae University seminar. This happened shortly after he'd declined to participate in Island's 50th Anniversary celebrations.

"I've learnt that if you don't have anything good to say about someone, then don't say *nothing*," he now says with a smile, after I'd asked him about this. "Silence is golden, but it also speaks volumes, you know what I mean? It's good to just keep your mouth shut and anyway, they've got their own toilets to clean out."

The enmity between him and Blackwell is longstanding, and was something he mentioned during my first interview with him, 20 years ago this month. It was to be my first-ever feature in Echoes and when I mentioned this he replied, "Better make it a good one then." I later discovered my tape recorder hadn't worked properly and I could

REGGAE ALBUMS TOP 25

- 1 **SANGHEZ** *NOV AND FOREVER* (VPI)
- 2 **PRESSURE** *COMING BACK FOR YOU* (RIMSHOT)
- 3 **VARIOUS** *GHETTO RIDDIM* (VPI)
- 4 **VARIOUS** *COVERS FOR REGGAE LOVERS* (VPI)
- 5 **SIZZLA** *CRUCIAL TIME* (GREENSLEEVES)
- 6 **VARIOUS** *SUGAR RIDDIM* (SPECIAL DELIVERY)
- 7 **VARIOUS** *STRICTLY THE BEST 40* (VPI)
- 8 **PETER HUNNINGALE** *REGGAE VILLE* (MUSICAL THERAPY)
- 9 **STEVE FACE** *TELL IT LIKE IT IS* (BOOT CAMP)
- 10 **VARIOUS** *STRANGE THINGS* (IRIE ITES)
- 11 **CHEZDEK** *IRGRADE* (TAXI)
- 12 **VARIOUS** *STRICTLY THE BEST 41* (VPI)
- 13 **COURTNEY JOHN** *MADE IN JAMAICA* (F/W MUSIC)
- 14 **DENNIS MCCLAIN** *SEEK THE OLD PATH* (HEART MUSIC)
- 15 **LOYD BROWN** *FOG YOUR CONSIDERATION* (FOCUSUS)
- 16 **TARRUS RILEY** *CONTAGIOUS* (VPI)
- 17 **BITTY MCLEAN** *MOVING ON* (TAXI)
- 18 **SANDRA CROSS** *NOW LOSE FRAZIER!*
- 19 **VYBEZ KARTEL** *PON DI GAHER 20* (TAS)
- 20 **VARIOUS** *BIGGEST REGGAE ONE DROP* (ANTHEMS 2009) (GREENSLEEVES)
- 21 **VARIOUS** *STRICTLY LOVERS ROCK #3* (FOCUSUS)
- 22 **GLEN WASHINGTON** *QUEEN AFRICA* (MONTAGO BAY) (VPI)
- 23 **ALBAROSE** *ESCAPE FROM BABYLON* (GREENSLEEVES)
- 24 **VARIOUS** *HOLIDAY INN* (VPI)



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- 17 BITTY MCCLLEAN MOVING ON (TAXI)
- 18 SANDRA CROSS NOW (LOE FRAZIER)
- 19 VYBZ KARTEL PON DI GATHER 20 (TAGS)
- 20 VARIOUS BIGGEST REGGAE ONE DROP ANTHEMS 2009 (GREENSLEEVES)
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