

SOUL MUSIC

Fromm Institute

Week Seven: Reggae and Other Soul Offshoots

Recommended Listening:

Alton Ellis, *Alton & Hortense* (Heartbeat, 1990). There are more wide-ranging rock-steady anthologies available, but this collection of late-'60s sides, featuring solo performances by one of Jamaica's premier vocalists (Alton) and his much less famous but similarly talented sister (Hortense), is enchanting romantic music that makes clear the influence of American '60s soul on reggae.

Fela Ransome Kuti and His Koola Lobitos, *Highlife-Jazz and Afro-Soul 1963-1969* (Knitting Factory, 2016). This three-CD set of Fela's 1960s recordings in some ways finds him evolving toward the Afrobeat style, mixing soul, jazz, and African highlife, sometimes on instrumentals, and sometimes with English lyrics. The songs are fairly diverse, with some great weird slightly dissonant horn lines. They're also fairly different from the non-African soul and jazz he was clearly influenced by, mixing in a lot of African influences, uplifting energy, and his own originality.

Herbie Hancock, *Headhunters* (Columbia, 1973). Along with Miles Davis, keyboardist Hancock (who had played with Davis for five years in the 1960s) was the most successful jazz star to make the transition to electric jazz-rock. This was one of the highest-selling jazz albums of all time, and heavily funk-influenced.

Michael Jackson, *Off the Wall* (Epic, 1979). The album that established Michael Jackson as a solo superstar outside of the Jackson Five, setting the stage for his follow-up, *Thriller*, the biggest-selling album of all time by anyone.

Bob Marley, *Legend* (Universal, 1984). Marley recorded prolifically, solo and with the Wailers, throughout the 1960s and 1970s. It's thus hard to say this 14-song compilation is representative of his legacy, but it does include the songs that were most crucial to making him an international legend beyond Jamaica, including "I Shot the Sheriff," "No Woman No Cry," "Stir It Up," "Get Up Stand Up," and "Redemption Song."

Bob Marley & the Wailers, *One Love* (Heartbeat, 1991). Two-CD compilation of material the Wailers recorded in Jamaica from 1963-66. Although this is ska in orientation, there's a lot of influence from soul music, especially in the vocal harmonies.

Bob Marley & the Wailers, *Wail'N Soul'M Singles Selecta* (Universal, 2005). Fine compilation of tracks the Wailers recorded for singles on their own Wail'N Soul'M label circa 1967-1968, when they were moving from ska to reggae, but retained a lot of influence from American soul vocal groups. It would be nice if other compilations could

gather most or all of their 1969-1972 non-LP singles in as compact a fashion, but while those singles are on various reissues, they're scattered over many different anthologies.

Johnny Nash, *The Reggae Collection* (Epic/Legacy, 1993). Twenty-track collection spanning the late '60s to the mid-'70s, focusing on the reggae-inspired work of the first (and, still, one of the few) musicians to fuse rock and soul with reggae for commercial success. Includes the big hits and several less famous songs.

Toots & the Maytals, *Funky Kingston* (Mango, 1973). The most acclaimed album by Toots Hibbert, widely acknowledged as reggae's most soulful singer.

Various Artists, *Get Down Tonight: The Best of Disco* (Rhino, 2002). Basic twelve-song compilation with representatively huge disco hits, including the Trammps' "Disco Inferno," K.C. & the Sunshine Band's "Get Down Tonight," the Average White Band's "Pick Up the Pieces," George McCrae's "Rock Your Baby," and Anita Ward's "Ring My Bell." Although the title of this anthology is very similar to another on the Rhino label (*Get Down Tonight: The Best of T.K. Records*) and has some of the same tracks, it's an entirely different release. Rhino also did a seven-volume best-of disco series, if you're so inclined to search those out.

Various Artists, *Get Down Tonight: The Best of T.K. Records* (Rhino, 1990). Miami's T.K. label was key to both developing and popularizing disco in the mid-1970s. This has well known hits by George McCrae ("Rock Your Baby"), K.C. & the Sunshine Band, and others, as well as Timmy Thomas's "Why Can't We Live Together," the pre-disco 1973 soul hit with a tropical feel.

Various Artists, *The Harder They Come* (Hip-O, 2003). The soundtrack to the classic early-1970s film starring Jimmy Cliff as a fugitive reggae singer in Jamaica was itself a classic that helped fuel reggae's popularity abroad, with cuts by Cliff, the Maytals, Desmond Dekker, and others. The two-CD 2003 expanded edition makes it that much more essential, with additional hits and classics by Cliff, the Maytals, Johnny Nash, Desmond Dekker (his big late-'60s single "Israelites"), Dave & Ansel Collins, and more.

Various Artists, *Roots of Reggae Vol. 2: Rock Steady* (Rhino, 1996). Compilation of 1966-1970 tracks that surveys reggae's evolution from ska to the slower, more soulful style of rock steady. Most of the artists aren't known to non-reggae specialists, though one of the songs, the Paragons' "The Tide Is High," would become a #1 hit for Blondie in 1980.

Various Artists, *Saturday Night Fever* (Polydor, 1977). The hit movie most responsible for documenting the disco lifestyle also generated, via its soundtrack, the biggest-selling disco album. Besides several hits by the Bee Gees, it also had popular tracks by Kool & the Gang, K.C. & the Sunshine Band, and the Trammps.

Various Artists, *Scandal Ska* (Mango, 1989). Though this is very outside of the time frame of this class, this collection of early-'60s ska tracks is a good representation of the

Jamaican music that gave birth to reggae, with tracks by Bob Marley, Desmond Dekker, Jimmy Cliff, top reggae guitarist Ernest Ranglin, and others.

Various Artists, *Street Jams: Hip-Hop from the Top, Vol. 1* (Rhino, 1992).

Compilation of some of the earliest rap records from the late 1970s and early 1980s, including the Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight," the first widely heard rap disc.

Recommended Books:

Bob Marley: The Untold Story, by Chris Salewicz (Faber & Faber, 2009). There are several Bob Marley biographies, and numerous books focusing on one or several aspects of his career without functioning as overviews. Virtually all of them are seriously flawed, whether in terms of fanciful or unfocused writing, or in lack of clarity in researching the essentials of his oft-ill-documented career (especially the ten years or so before he came to international prominence in 1973). Though not ideal, this is the best Marley biography, and the one that is most diligent in sorting out and reporting what happened when. While the title implies that the book is devoted to material that hasn't been covered elsewhere, actually for the most part it is a conventional biography.

Bob Marley & the Wailers: The Ultimate Illustrated History, by Richie Unterberger (Voyageur Press, 2017). Coffee table photo-oriented book on Marley & the Wailers, with text by the instructor of this course that offers a more straightforward and music-focused overview of their work than most other writing.

Possibilities, by Herbie Hancock with Lisa Dickey (Viking, 2014). Straightforward, highly readable memoir by the jazz/funk crossover star covers his unlikely evolution from straightforward jazz pianist in the 1960s (as both a solo artist and member of Miles Davis's band) to pop star when he went into jazz-rock-funk fusion in the 1970s and 1980s.

This Is Reggae Music: The Story of Jamaica's Music, by Lloyd Bradley (Grove Press, 2001). For some reason, reggae has resisted being written about in a very accessible and straightforwardly detailed fashion, perhaps in part because the music's origins weren't documented nearly as clearly as popular music in the US and UK. This book is no exception, but it was still the noblest attempt at an overall reggae history. *The Rough Guide to Reggae* is a useful reggae reference book emphasizing artist profiles and album reviews, though it too suffered from some of these problems.

Recommended DVDs:

Bob Marley & the Wailers, Catch a Fire (Eagle Rock, 1999). Hour-long documentary on the making of the first Wailers album to get international distribution and attention, mixing archive performance footage and interviews with people involved with the record.

Bob Marley, Marley (Magnolia Pictures, 2012). Lengthy documentary about the most famous reggae musician has plenty of vintage footage (mostly from the 1970s) and

interviews conducted for the film with musical and personal associates, examining both his music and his involvement with political/spiritual matters. The heavy Jamaican dialect of some of the interviewees does make it heavy going at times, and the coverage is tilted toward the last few years of his life.

The Harder They Come (Xenon, 1972). *The Harder They Come* not only captured the milieu of the Kingston, Jamaica slums from which much reggae emerged, but also much of the essence of the music itself. This was achieved by having an actual reggae star (Jimmy Cliff) take the lead role, as an outlaw on the run; the use of much classic reggae as the film's soundtrack; and having Cliff become a reggae star in the actual movie's plot, including a memorable scene where he sings the title song in a recording studio (and immediately gets asked to sign an exploitative recording contract).

Saturday Night Fever (Paramount, 1977). The movie that caught disco at the very height of its popularity, and made a superstar out of John Travolta. The story of a lower-class suburban New Yorker finding release on the dance floor isn't as dramatic or powerful as some reviewers made it out to be, but the soundtrack became the most popular disco album of all, and one of the most popular albums of all time, period.

Notable Figures (Excluding Star Musicians):

Chris Blackwell: Though he'd already played a major part in rock at Island Records, and in early ska and reggae, he was especially crucial to pushing Bob Marley and the Wailers to international prominence.

Neil Bogart: Head of Casablanca Records, home to two of the era's least critically respected but biggest-selling acts tied to emerging genres: Kiss (glam rock) and Donna Summer (disco).

Clement "Coxsone" Dodd: Owner and producer at Studio One, the most influential Jamaican reggae and ska label of the 1960s and 1970s.

Henry Stone: Head of T.K. Records, the Miami label that did much to ignite the disco boom.

Sylvia Robinson: After having a big early rock'n'roll hit ("Love Is Strange") as half of Mickey & Sylvia, and then a solo hit in 1973 with "Pillow Talk," she made a mark on R&B music as a producer/executive at Sugar Hill Records, the first big rap label.

Notable Places:

56 Hope Road, Kingston, Jamaica: Former home of Bob Marley, which also housed the Tuff Gong label formed by his band, the Wailers. On December 3, 1976, it was also the site of a failed assassination attempt on Marley. Today it is the Bob Marley Museum.

Tuff Gong: Still-running Kingston, Jamaica studio (and record label) formed by Bob Marley and the Wailers.

Important Record Labels:

Casablanca: Important part of disco as home of Donna Summer, though it also had Kiss and Parliament on its roster.

Island: Influential in several eras, Island was central to the rise of reggae's international popularity with Bob Marley, Toots & the Maytals, Burning Spear, and other artists, as well as issuing the soundtrack to *The Harder They Come*.

Studio One: Probably the most popular and influential Jamaican reggae (and, earlier, ska) label of the 1960s and 1970s.

T.K.: Miami label that was a major player in the disco field with hits by George McCrae, K.C. & the Sunshine Band, and others.

Tuff Gong: Label (and studio) formed by Bob Marley & the Wailers, though the Wailers did not always use it for their own releases.

AV Clips:

Bob Marley & the Wailers: Stir It Up (DVD)

Millie Small: My Boy Lollipop (DVD)

Toots & the Maytals: She Will Never Let You Down (DVD)

The Paragons: The Tide Is High (CD)

The Wailers: I'm Still Waiting (CD)

The Wailers: Dancing Shoes (CD)

The Wailers: Stay With Me (CD)

The Wailers: Pound Get a Blow (CD)

The Wailers: Steppin' Razor (CD)

Desmond Dekker: The Israelites (DVD)

Johnny Nash: I Can See Clearly Now (DVD)

Johnny Nash: Stir It Up (CD)

Jimmy Cliff: The Harder They Come (DVD)

Bob Marley & the Wailers: I Shot the Sherriff (DVD)

Bob Marley & the Wailers: Get Up, Stand Up (DVD)

Curtis Mayfield: People Get Ready (DVD)

Bob Marley & the Wailers: Stop That Train (DVD)

Toots & the Maytals: Pressure Drop (DVD)

Burning Spear: Slavery Days (CD)

Timmy Thomas: Why Can't We Live Together

The Isley Brothers: Who's That Lady (CD)

The Isley Brothers: Who's That Lady (DVD) Herbie Hancock: Chameleon (DVD)

Al Green: Take Me to the River (DVD)

LaBelle: Lady Marmalade (DVD)
Parliament-Funkadelic: Cosmic Slop (DVD)
Natalie Cole: This Will Be (DVD)
Manu Dibango: Soul Makossa (DVD)
Fela: Don't Gag Me (DVD)
Barry White: I'm Gonna Love You Just a Little Bit More Baby (DVD)
Surprise bonus clip
MFSB: The Sound of Philadelphia (DVD)
George McCrae: Rock Me Baby (DVD)
Andrea True Connection: More More More (DVD)
The Trammps: Disco Inferno (DVD)
The Bee Gees: Stayin' Alive (DVD)
Sylvester: You Make Me Real (DVD)
Chic: Freak Out (DVD)
Michael Jackson: Rock with You (DVD)
The Sugarhill Gang: Rapper's Delight (DVD)
Ray Charles: I Believe to My Soul (DVD)
Stevie Wonder: Sir Duke (DVD)
Surprise bonus clip