

Clement "Sir Coxson" Dobb

The father of Jamaican music



Clement 'Sir Coxson' Dobb

By Julian "Jingles" Reynolds

NEW YORK

Clement Seymour Dobb, or "Sir Coxson's Downbeat" is in the minds of most lovers of Blue Beat, Ska, Rock Steady, and Reggae music as the most important and influential person in the Jamaican recording industry. In the early 1950's in Kingston, Sir Coxson was one of the pioneers, along with Jack Taylor and Roy White, importing American Rhythms & Blues, Jazz, and Be-Bop music mainly from Memphis, New Orleans and Miami, for the fledg-

ling but voracious Jamaican music-consuming market. Dobb as a very young man had travelled on the farm work programme from Jamaica to the American farms of the South and mid-West, and was exposed to both the driving rhythms busting out then, as well as the emerging technology of radio amplifiers. It piqued his interest and stimulated his entrepreneurial spirit.

American entertainers were danced to from Friday nights to Monday mornings throughout the dance halls of Jamaica, thanks to the maestro, "Sir Coxson", and other sound system operators such as "Duke Reid the Trojan", "Tom the Great Sebastian", "V-Rocket", "Lord Koo's" "Count Nicks" and "Prince Buster."

By the late 50's, "Sir Coxson's Downbeat" had established itself as Jamaica's number one sound system. The late Clifford "Jackie" Ellis, a tailor, and one of the first and most ardent supporters of Coxson, said that he remembered "Downbeat" first playing at a "lawn" on Penn Street in Jones Town, on Tuesdays. It was around 1954. What differentiated Coxson's sound from most of the others was "his musical selections", mostly dancing music, "shuffling music" interspersed with "some bad jazz." He wasn't the biggest sound, or the loudest, but Downbeat was the best. He just had the

music, the good vibes."

He had his hardcore group of supporters, chief among them his mother, Doris "Nanny" Darlington, and others like "Baskin", "Sam Jeggy", "Sock A Few", "Peckings", "James Evil" and Norma, the young beauty who became his wife. So popular and well organized "Sir Coxson's Downbeat" had become, that he had five sets, playing at different dance halls or lawns around the island with DJs and selectors like Count Machukie and King Sporty.

It was at this point that Dobb had the vision of recording his own music; bringing together the young, extremely talented Jamaican musicians and singers, combined with the musical ideas of America fused with the indigenous music of Jamaica and the Caribbean. The labels of Studio One and Coxson were launched featuring entertainers like Rolando Alphonso, Monty Alexander, Aubrey Adams, Clue J and the Blues Blasters, Ernest Ranglin, Derrick Harriott and the Jiving Juniors, Owen Gray, Dobby Dobson, Count Ossie, Don Drummond, Bunny and Skitter, the Moonlighters, Joe Giggs, Bunny and Skully, among many others. At first he recorded at the early Jamaican recording facilities; Federal Records, Stanley Motta's, West Indies Records Ltd. But, it wasn't to be too long that, Dobb's vision again pushed him forward to establishing his own, Jamaica Recording and Publishing Studios, in the early 1960s.

He became the visionary that launched the careers of almost every

important recording artiste to have come out of Jamaica including Bob Andy, Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Bunny Wailer, Toots & The Maytals, Delroy Wilson, Laurel Aitken, John Holt and the Paragons, Marcia Griffiths, Rita Marley, the Skatalites, Horace Andy, Delroy Wilson, B.B. Seaton and the Gaylads, Leroy Sibbles and the Heptones, the Clarendonians, Owen Gray, Burning Spear, Alton Ellis, Hortenso Ellis, Prince Buster, Lee "Scratch" Perry, Ken Boothe, Jimmy James, and Jackie Mittoo. But not only did he influence the careers of so many great Jamaican talent, he also impacted the career and success of undoubtedly the most financially rewarded Jamaican entertainment entrepreneur, Chris Blackwell, the founder of Island Records. It was Dobb who provided most of the records and entertainers that Blackwell took to England in the early 1960s, that gave birth to his musical empire.

Indeed, to attest to the magnitude of his works, the Studio One catalogue lists over 5,000 recordings, spanning just over 40 years. Today, over 60 percent of the rhythms used by other producers and entertainers in Jamaica are Studio One originals.

And the beat goes on, as Dobb continues his journey, his mission of making great Jamaican music. He has established a new company, Studio One World, Inc. in Brooklyn, New York, presenting new, dynamic acts making fresh, bold new music; blending the old with the new, different musical genres.

At press time Studio One World, Inc.

was showcasing this new look at the MIDEAM Latin American & Caribbean '97 Exposition, at the Miami Beach Convention Center. With a concert on Tuesday, at the Cameo Theater, Studio One presented, Alton Ellis, Marcia Griffiths and King Stitt representing the old, and J.D. Smooth and Glen Washington representing the new. The company also unveiled an album over ten years in the making, entitled "Reggae Au Go Jazz" featuring the Jamaican-born trumpeter Roy "Bubbles" Burrowes, who has played with Duke Ellington and Ray Charles, along with the late Cliff Jordan on tenor sax and Charles Davis on tenor and clarinet. Dobb has also recently signed distribution deals with major chains around the world, and will be distributing selective products by other record producers.

The 1991 Studio One 35th Anniversary concert held in Kingston and Montego Bay, featuring over 50 Studio One entertainers was also slated for video release at MIDEAM.

"There has been a lot of misconceptions and misinformation about me and this business," said Dobb in an exclusive interview in his Brooklyn office "but it has been a tremendous struggle keeping this business going for over 40 years, and especially over the last 12 years, as I made the transition from Kingston to New York as my base. It has been a labour of love for me more than anything, but I am convinced that the best days for this company and my artistes are ahead."