



Bob Marley: The Life and Legacy of Reggae's Global Icon

Charles River Editors

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“We don't have education, we have inspiration; if I was educated I would be a damn fool.” – Bob Marley

“If there remains any magic, it is music.” – Bob Marley

In terms of raw popularity, Bob Marley sold over 20 million albums in a brief career that took him around the globe as “the first international superstar from the so-called Third World,” but the journey from anonymity within his own culture to reigning as “the defining figure of Jamaican music” was a circuitous and dangerous one. After leaving home at the age of 14, Marley’s street skills helped him “gain a foothold in Jamaica’s chaotic music industry while skillfully navigating politically partisan violence that abounded in Kingston through the 70s,” and his exaltation of the reggae form, couched in the Rastafari, became an instrument of order as a haven for otherwise directionless youth in Kingston and other communities of Jamaica.

Beginning with the more lighthearted ska style, Marley drew fellow Jamaicans as kindred spirits by adding social commentary to the lyrics, and as these popular dance hits were infused with songs of faith, the weightier genre of reggae emerged. Marley would become “one of the genre’s most beloved artists,” and to the outer world, he is by far the most iconic individual associated with the form and the era. As the merely distractive element of ska fell away “into the slower, bass-heavy reggae sound,” the accompanying depth of message lifted him above the category of mere entertainer, and his fellow Jamaican youth turned to him for social truths. As a Rolling Stone writer noted, “Marley wasn't singing about how peace could come easily to the World but rather how hell on Earth comes too easily to too many. His songs were his memories; he had lived with the wretched, he had seen the downpressers and those whom they pressed down.”

The true power of the reggae and Rastafari movements, with Marley as the messenger, was generated in Jamaica itself through epic concerts that reached the status of “mystical events” before growing into a global attraction that could no longer be ignored. What was for a foreign audiences a fresh sound was for the Caribbean (and for Jamaicans in particular) “a vital folk art,” and along with the musical and religious waves that swept from Jamaica through the world came the cult of Marley himself, calling on the black man and woman to overthrow the influences of “Babylon” (Western institutions of oppression) while living with people of all races in harmony. Decades after Marley’s death, his status as a figurehead of the reggae movement and Rastafari faith remains secure, and in many ways, his public legend loosely parallels those of Michael Jackson, John Lennon, and Elvis Presley.

Bob Marley: The Life and Legacy of Reggae’s Global Icon chronicles the life, career, and legacy of one of the world’s most famous musicians. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about Bob Marley like never before, in no time at all.

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