



Dub: Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae

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Winner of the ARSC's Award for Best Research (History) in Folk, Ethnic, or World Music (2008)

When Jamaican recording engineers Osbourne "King Tubby" Ruddock, Errol Thompson, and Lee "Scratch" Perry began crafting "dub" music in the early 1970s, they were initiating a musical revolution that continues to have worldwide influence. Dub is a sub-genre of Jamaican reggae that flourished during reggae's "golden age" of the late 1960s through the early 1980s. Dub involves remixing existing recordings--electronically improvising sound effects and altering vocal tracks--to create its unique sound. Just as hip-hop turned phonograph turntables into musical instruments, dub turned the mixing and sound processing technologies of the recording studio into instruments of composition and real-time improvisation. In addition to chronicling dub's development and offering the first thorough analysis of the music itself, author Michael Veal examines dub's social significance in Jamaican culture. He further explores the "dub revolution" that has crossed musical and cultural boundaries for over thirty years, influencing a wide variety of musical genres around the globe.

Dub: Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae Details

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From Reader Review Dub: Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae for online ebook

Kris says

A great insider look at dub music, in terms of the personalities behind it, the times that formed it, the influence it had, and musical make up of the dub pieces themselves. This is in depth stuff not for the merely curious, but essential reading for the dub fanatic.

Joe says

Some great bios and stories of the key players in dub are the highlight of this book. There are also some interesting ideas about connections between dub and other musical styles. All that being said, if I was on the thesis committee for this book, my red pen would have just about run out of ink. I'm not against academic writing - this is just a potential diamond in the rough that needs much more polish to be clear.

That being said, between some tips from this book, Internet searches, Pandora's dub channel, and watching the film Rockers (recommended), I've had an enjoyable, deeper excursion into the world of dub.

Sheehan says

I can't remember the first dub track I heard, but I can definitely remember chasing down versions (separate artist tracked iterations) of dancehall "riddims" in the 90's and stumbling my way backward into the original pre-digital Studio One/Randy's era ska/reggae pre-cursors. So basically I danced all around dub for years chasing dancehall from NYC hip-hop, reggae, ska and rocksteady from dancehall, and never really hitting unto the dub sounds until the late 1990's.

And then my world opened up, the Blood and Fire label was reissuing so many masters of dub, my homeboy Dan turned me on to King Tubby, and well really from then on, I pretty much found my heart in the rockers-era Waterhouse sounds of Jamaican Dub. Oh I see everything in relation to dub now, the compositional insertions, mood-shifts of the dub versions, and most importantly, what is said in the absences and pauses. The power of silence was something that really resonated in that time of my life, as I was transitioning from a youngster full of political hubris and eager to speak on it, to a more moderated mature(ing) adult who saw the gravity of sometimes NOT needing to say something.

Of course, now it's like the old Tootsie Roll ads, where everything the kid sees turns into a tootsie roll. That's my life now, everything I hear, I see dub, I see pastiche and hear the versions that could be made from the source material. My lifestyle now reflects this, sometimes I stand back and let the rhythm of the scene ride on without comment, sometimes I shout down nonsense, sometimes I repeat myself...but I am always my original self, getting just a bit better, just like a dub version.

So this book is amazing in part because it not only provides a great history of dub, with good primary source interviews, it also contextualizes dub as helping create a meta-history of post-modern blackness that creates a referent point for reflection beyond just the auditory. Something that ties together American Soul to Reggae

to Dancehall to hip-hop to electronica to ambient to jungle, ad infinitum...The deconstructive process of the music gets reified in so many of the forms that succeed it.

Great musical history, a bit academic for those put off by critical theory, but really well thought out and researched, a great addition to the canon of literature on Jamaican music.

Brian says

[illegible]

Less_cunning says

absolutely great book. probably one of the top 5 books on music that i have read. although its written by an academic its a very straight-forward book not weighted down by ivory tower jargon or jumbled post-modern theories, it chronicles the basic historical narrative of Dub while illustrating how Dub studio techniques & methodologies have influenced contemporary music. while it primarily focuses on the principal engineers & studios that were key in the development of Dub music, the book clearly shows the different approaches & technical means that were employed by each. this book also shows the political economy & more sociological aspects of the dynamics of Dub music & demonstrates both how spirituality & the influence of the African diaspora factored into the making of Dub music as well.

i checked this book out at the library but i hope to buy it in the future to use it as a reference book & consult it in the future.

Spencer says

This was an extraordinarily well-researched book by an author with unquestioned credentials as a musical historian and scholar. Unfortunately, the rather compelling histories of Dub's origins, context and key players were offset by an overly academic analysis of its impact. I never expected a book ostensibly about music to be so riddled with scholarly references to hyphenated-last-name "thinkers" or the "cross-cultural renegotiation of our understanding of modernity." Also, I've never seen the word "post" appear so many times in a single book. Still, I don't mean to hate. It's clear from the author's introduction that this is a personal music to him -- one that grabbed his attention immediately and held it with sufficient vigor to create this extremely thorough review. And I greatly appreciate the new understanding I have gained about the specific personalities involved in the genesis and proliferation of the music, the details of the equipment and studios being used to create it, and the context in which Dub was played in Jamaica and abroad. I also appreciate the effort in linking Dub to the other styles of music it influenced, but I had hoped for more causal and direct links rather than theorized and abstract ones. The author takes pains to mention that there has never before been a book dedicated solely to the genre of Dub, and I am very grateful that the subject has been taken up and that this book exists. I suppose that I had just hoped that the first volume on the subject

would be a pure history, concerned more with chronicling the who, what, when, where and how of the music rather than using it as a launching point for a pedantic examination of its social and cultural implications.

For those looking for what I was, I recommend skipping the intro, reading chapters 1-7, and then the appendix.

Graham says

Solid overview of dub that touches on musicology, history, and post-colonial theory to explain the style's prominence and lasting influence. The only real issue I had with the book are the constant comparisons of songs with their dub remix versions, replete with blow-by-blow verbal descriptions of what's happening in the song, in technical musicologist terminology. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, though some of the language can get overwhelming to those inexperienced in this field, but to really appreciate it one has to have access to both the songs described or it just ends up seeming a bit hard to grasp. Aside from that, an excellent overview of a rarely-covered field of study.

Colin Masso says

This book had much to say on the techniques used to create some of the most distinctive soundscapes in recorded music. It also had much to say on the impact that Dub has had on a plethora of music that followed it. However, it kind of glossed over that part, in my opinion. Not a mention of Connie Plank or Brian Eno, or really anything outside of the United Kingdom in Europe. The reason that I think those two artists in particular were important to have brought up, is that their influence from Dub was derived during its most fertile period. Certainly Veal covers the far-reaching influence of the genre after its decline and transformation into Raga and Dancehall, but really missed out on what a fantastic influence it had in the early and mid seventies, as can be heard on recordings by Can, The Talking Heads, and Eno himself. This music didn't really sound like Dub, but took to heart the creative process of playing the studio like an instrument, which to me is more interesting than music that is directly derivative. With that said, if you want to learn about things that extend well beyond "King Tubby was born in _____", and "Lee Perry produced _____", and actually get some insight into how they made some of that magic happen, look no further.

Ray says

One of the best researched books about reggae ever! Despite its limited title, it is a well written history of reggae without rehashing material from other books on reggae. Of course the focus is on dub.

This book provides more detail than I'd ever hoped for- even the details of the specific and recording techniques used in mixing dub tracks. The author also covers the historical and sociological influences on dub and its assimilation into music of many cultures.

I most enjoyed the features on specific engineers, who are rarely credited for their innovations. The author cites specific a and b-sides of singles to describe what makes each engineer unique. I found most of the tracks on Rdio and YouTube. BTW I am amazed at how many great dub tracks and channels are posted on YouTube.

Jesse says

Clear-headed academic overview of dub. The writing isn't enthralling, but it's not supposed to be. Wish it had recommended playlists.

Adam says

A brilliant blend of ethnomusicology, historiography, and fandom for an underappreciated genre of music.

Lawrence says

more academic than pop...strives to make dub "important" but worth slogging through. great history, facts and context

Darren Hemmings says

If this is not the only book written about the dub artform then it is certainly the only one worth reading. Veal manages an expert dissection of the roots of dub, its development and critically its meaning to its practitioners and fans, without ever dropping into dry academic study or frothing hyperbole. If like me you're a big fan of dub, this is absolutely essential reading. Track it down if you can; these days I gather it is quite tough-to-find.
