

T.O. reggae scene still sizzling



ERROL NAZARETH
Rhythms N Rhymes

As evidenced by six crucial albums that comprise the critically acclaimed Jamaica to Toronto series released by an American independent label a few years ago, this city was a hotbed of crucial reggae, soul and funk some 40 years back.

You wouldn't know that if you lived here at that time since the music didn't get any love from the mainstream media.

Fast-forward to 2010 and the situation is the same.

But just because reggae's mainstream profile is static, it doesn't mean there isn't a local scene. Tune in to college radio shows like Carrie Mullings' Rebel VibeZ on CHRY (105.5) FM or check out reggae and dub parties like Super Heavy Reggae or Dub & Beyond to hear and see what's up. Or pick up these three essential discs: Aram Scaram's *Citizen Sound*, *Renegade Rocker* from Dubmatix and *Shatter the Hotel: A Dub Inspired Tribute to Joe Strummer* which was produced by Prince Blanco.

"The local scene is really exciting right now," says Scaram, a DJ and producer who's co-hosted Version Xcursion on CKLN (88.1) FM with Sassa'le for the last 13 years.

"Toronto has some great vocalists and producers who are making world-class reggae right here. In the past, there was this belief that you had to go to Jamaica to get a real reggae sound, but that's no longer the case.

"Dubmatix is a perfect example," he adds. "His sound is heavy, he's worked with so many legends in reggae and he's gained respect worldwide — and he does it all right here."

If the above-mentioned records prove anything, it's that some cutting-edge dub is being made in this city at a pretty hectic pace. Sure, there are some throwaway tracks on each of those discs, but they're great introductions to compelling new voices like Ammoye.

"I like Ammoye a lot," says

Scaram, who invited her to lend her sweet, emotive vocals to *Citizen Sound*. "She's been recording with Dubmatix and Natewize and is definitely an artist to look out for. Treson is also a really talented voice so look out for him, and Dubmatix has a new album (*System Shakedown*) coming out in the fall featuring Jamaican reggae legends like Gregory Isaacs, Tippa Irie and The Mighty Diamonds."

To that list, add names like Jason Wilson, Bonjay, Melodic Yoza and Dylan Murray.

One of *Citizen Sound's* selling points is that it isn't a rehash of classic Jamaican reggae rhythms or repertoire.

"The production style is influenced by reggae, however, I wanted to bring modern elements into the production and sound and hopefully create something unique and exciting," Scaram says.



SCARAM

"I didn't want to do a straight-up traditional reggae album, but I did want to approach it from a riddim perspective so the songs were built always with the music first and then I'd pick the right artist to do a version.

"The first song on the album was inspired by a classic song (*Wa Do Dem*) and Ammoye's soulful toasting really sets the tone for the CD," he adds. "Finally, in the tradition of sound system culture, part of my future plans for this project will be to get other artists doing versions on these riddims along with remixes."

Scaram sure knows how to shake things up in the studio and on the air, and this appeals to Prince Blanco, who won a Juno this year with Dubmatix for their single *Gonna Be Alright*.

"I've listened to Version Xcursion for many years and what I love is the fact that it's not just two hours of straight reggae or dub, not that there would be anything wrong with that of course, but the guys rinse all the off-shoots of bass culture like drum & bass, trip-hop and dubstep," Blanco says. "And their Canadian Spotlight segment is essential for artists like myself when it comes to promoting a new single, album or remix since it provides one of the few terrestrial radio outlets left that will give exposure to what we're trying to put out there." Incidentally, Blanco composed the rhythm for *Reggae Is Her Name*, the album's Juno-worthy single. A sweet love letter to reggae, it features Blessed and is one of the disc's standout tracks.

"I gave him the theme and he took that concept and wrote great lyrics, delivered a strong performance and tells a great story," Scaram says. "I think we created something really special with that song — a tribute to the music I love and the music that has inspired me as a producer, and inspired the *Citizen Sound* project."

Now
HEAR
This!

Errol's can't-miss list:

1 Jason Wilson plays outside The Gull & The Firkin tonight and Saturday as part of the Beaches International Jazz Festival. 7-11 p.m. 1943 Queen St. E.

2 Sundar's **Indus-Trio** plays the BLC Artist Café Stage at Exhibition Stadium tonight as part of the Masala! Mehndi! Masti! festival. For details, visit masalamehndimasti.com/2010

3 **Orquesta Fantasia**, purveyors of classic Colombian cumbia, vallenato and salsa, play Lula Lounge Saturday. 10 p.m. \$15. 1585 Dundas St. W..

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