

CHAPTER 4

The rise of reggae

When Bob came back to Kingston, Bunny and Tosh were still making music as The Wailers. Rita was waiting for Bob, and she had lots to tell him. In April, 1966, Haile Selassie I, the Emperor of the African country of Ethiopia, had visited Jamaica. Selassie believed that all the black people of Africa should come together. But for some people in Jamaica, Selassie was much more than just a political leader, he was the living god of the religious movement, Rastafari.



Crowds in Kingston wait for Haile Selassie I to arrive.

There were many Rastas in Trench Town and Bob had spent time with them before he left for the US. The ideas of the movement were attractive to him. As a child of

RASTAFARI



Rastafari is a religious movement that started in Jamaica and grew from Christian beliefs in the 1930s. Rastafarians, or Rastas, believe that the true word of God, or Jah, was a message to the many black people around the world whose families had been taken from Africa as slaves. To Rastas, Africa is their true home. Many Rastafarians believe that Haile Selassie I, who became Emperor of Ethiopia in 1930, will one day lead his people back to their true home. The movement takes its name from Selassie's name before 1930, Ras Tafari. Rastafarians follow a way of life which they take from the Bible. They do not believe in cutting their hair and usually wear their hair in long dreadlocks or dreads. The lion is an important animal in Rastafari. Long dreadlocks look like a lion's hair. Rastas do not usually eat meat and drink no alcohol, but they use the drug marijuana. They say that it brings them closer to Jah.

The Rastafarian colours are red, green and gold. Black is important too.



Red is for the slaves who lost their lives in the fight to be free.



Green is the colour of the natural world and a sign of hope.



Gold is for the riches of the homeland, Ethiopia.



Black is the colour of the African people.



mixed race, Bob had never felt at home in either world, black or white. A central belief of Rastafari was that no black people outside Africa were 'at home'.

It is hard to say if Bob called himself a Rasta before he went to the US. Certainly, he had begun to explore the ideas of the movement and its way of life. After Selassie's visit, Rita became a strong believer in the Rastafari movement and from this time, Bob's music also showed the growing importance of his Rastafarian beliefs. The message that all people should live together in peace was always there in the words of his songs.

When he arrived back from the US, Bob could finally start his own record company. It was called Wail'n Soul'm* and was named after the two bands, The Wailers and The Soulettes. Musical tastes in Jamaica were changing. Now instead of ska, the slower dance style of rocksteady was more popular. The Wailers' first new record 'Bend Down Low' was in this style. Radio stations did not play the record much at first, but the band took records to dance halls themselves on bicycles! The plan was a success and the song was a hit. The band continued to be very popular in Jamaica. In October, 1967, their song 'Stir It Up' was another hit.

However, money was still a problem for the band. With a child for Rita and Bob on the way, The Wailers left Trench Town and moved to St Ann. The plan was to save money and live a simple life by working on the land. For a while, Bob and Bunny were happy to be back in the country. Peter Tosh found it harder – he was certainly not a country boy! He missed having a TV and an electric light to read by. Rita also missed Kingston and did not want to have her baby away from the city.

* Wail'n Soul'm later became Tuff Gong International.

The Wailers moved back to Kingston and Bob and Rita's daughter, Cedella – named after Bob's mother – was born on August the 23rd, 1967. The following year the couple had their first son. His name was David, but they called him Ziggy.

Around this time, The Wailers were looking for a new producer and they found someone who made a big difference to their music. Lee 'Scratch' Perry had once worked for Coxsone, but he left to start his own record company, Upsetter. Scratch had a group of musicians who he always worked with. The Barrett brothers were an important part of this group – Aston 'Family Man' Barrett played bass guitar and his brother, Carly, played drums. With Scratch producing and the Barrett brothers playing, the Wailers had begun to find a new sound in their music. This sound was reggae.



The Wailers, c. 1970