

Sting in the Tale

CARL DILLIE PERRY RELATES THE STORY OF HOW REAL REGGAE CAME TO WEMBLEY. JOHN MASOURI IS ALL EARS.



With Stingray's *Collection Vol.3* album now in the shops and several fresh singles already hotting up the airwaves, the invitation to take a trip out Wembley way to see their newly completed Big House studio couldn't be missed. Because this is no hastily converted back-room business but a highly professional 24-track set-up that JA producer Bobby Digital calls his "UK home from home". And no wonder, because they've got the same equipment as he uses back in Jamaica. In fact, were it not for the climate, the vibes of the place could even pass for Jamaican... except we're looking out onto a typical English garden instead of a Caribbean courtyard.

There's nuff artists deh 'bout too. Peter Hunnigale and Saxon boss Lloyd 'Muscle Head' Francis are busy putting final touches to their forthcoming album, and Don Campbell and Bubblers from Ruff Cutt are working inside when we arrive - both friends of Stingray's Carl 'Dillie' Perry from schooldays. The bulk of Stingray's new material was made here - including those current singles by Mikey Spice and Peter Hunnigale - and also the majority of Saxon's recent output. Between the two labels they've created a catalogue of work that'll stand up to comparison with any yard production team. Both specialise in high

quality roots and lovers and take proper care with their recordings, utilising only first-rate musicians and searching hard for that elusive 'authentic' reggae feel. The result is a collection of songs we'll still be playing years from now, a good few modern-day reggae classics among them. That they've reached this far without the backing of any major label is a notable achievement, and the establishing of their own distribution centre - which handles all of Digital B's product here in England - is further testament to their business ambitions.

Like his friend Muscle Head, Dillie entered the music via sound-system, rather than the playing of instruments. His first was Savannah, a Harlesden-based 'blues' sound who featured dee-jays like Bubbler Ranx - currently involved in the new *Baby Mother* film - and Youtie General on their set. Dillie then formed Love Injection with another old schoolfriend Mikey Koos, before both men branched out into radio. After stints as a DJ with Time Radio, WLR and other local stations, he then began working for Blue Mountain in the mid-'80s. It was through them he met Peter Chemist and Bobby Digital, whose early productions were all distributed by Blue Mountain. Travelling between the US, UK and JA, Dillie soon learnt how the reggae business worked,

and he and his brother Ray then began dabbling in production for themselves. Today Ray runs the administrative side of the Stingray operation, working from their office in nearby Alperton.

So what was their debut?
"Well nobody know about the first one," laughs Dillie.

"Cause a man I used to go a school with called Donovan sing the first tune I ever do. I used to work at this community centre, an' they had *everything*, man. The desk they had in there was the same one Bobby had at the time. This was up in Southall, an' they give me the keys to the place now, so I can just go in there an' do my own t'ings. So I call fi me lickle close friend there [Bubblers] an' the man lick two tune an' then Donovan come in to voice it."

Dillie says it was off-key and sounded terrible, but we'll have to take his word for it. Released on the flipside of an Earl Minott production, Donovan's cover of *All Around The World* sank without trace, although the label's next attempt fared much better.

"I move on from there, an' start to work with Dicky at Earth studio in Birmingham. It like a community t'ing again, an' Sammy Levi was around Blue Mountain them times, so I get to link-up with 'im. Through Sammy's vibes now, we used to go up there an' mix some tune, an' one time this

singer Benny Cruise was there, who voiced *Get In Touch* for us. That was the first proper Stingray release, I guess. An' a next you'll called Junie was there as well. 'Im sing like Singing Melody, cah there was another piece to that same riddim, but I never release it still. I've got it on tape up to now. But I'm gonna draw back for all them kinda man there soon."

Sammy Levi's *Your Love Is Alright* also dates from this era - circa '91 - as does his *Beautiful Love* album, on which Dillie was credited with production.

"To me that could 'ave been up to a better standard still," he admits now. "Cah that lickle Earth studio didn't 'ave no sound in there at first. But after that now we decide to go a Jamaica an' get some tunes licked. An' them times we link with Prezident Brown an' Shaggy Wonder; we start to spar regular, an' that was like a next source different from Bobby now. So I'm there in Kingston an' a man give me a lift to Ocho an' I link up with Barry O'Hare at Grove. An' 'im give me a good vibe, man, cah I didn't even 'ave a reel when I went there. He even 'ave to cut up one of his own tapes an' run off three tune pon it an' give me."

Hence Prezident Brown's *Halla Fi Money*, Professor Frisky's *Put Down The Gun* and Shaggy Wonder's *New Sound*,