



Lickshot

Michelle Edwards with reggae news and views



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF...

STINGRAY

Thirty-six-year-old Carl 'Dillie' McLeod is one of the three brothers behind Stingray Records, an enterprising entertainment outfit based in Perivale, west London. Together with his siblings, Ray and Allan, Stingray – founded in 1994 – has grown from strength to strength, combining a record label with in-house distribution.

Nicknamed 'Dillie' for sounding remarkably like Jamaican DJ Dillinger, McLeod started in the music business in the late Seventies with a short stint as a drummer with a band called I-lect, along with singer Don Campbell, keyboardist Carlton 'Bubblers' Ogilvie and bass player Kenneth McKensie.

From there he entered the sound system arena debuting as a selector for the north-west London sound Lord Kooos before moving on to Savannah and Love Injection. He then moved into broadcasting and became a DJ for his local radio station, Time Radio.

Unhappy with some of the politics that go hand-in-hand with smaller radio stations (namely the expense of buying all your records), McLeod became friendly with the owner of the now defunct Blue Mountain record label and notched up a job as part distributor. This position led him to top Jamaican producers Peter Chemist and Bobby Digital and provided him with the ambition to form his own studio, which has become a campus for both UK and JA talent. Last year they enjoyed two number one hits, Key To The City by Freddy McGregor and My God Is Real by Tony Curtis. Here 'Dillie' gives an account of one day in his hectic life.

Depending on my workload, an average day sees me wake up at roughly 9am. Generally I prefer an early start to the day as I've noticed, upon reflection, that the quality of my production – in terms of my enthusiasm, vibe and commitment – tends to be much better in the morning than when I've been out on the road all day and then flown back into the studio.

Once there, I like to warm up the place a little by putting on a D.A.T. (digital audio tape) containing previous recordings or experiments that later turned out to be a success for the Stingray crew. Some people may think that because you're in the music business it's all fun and games but, like other jobs, it's hard work.



(L-R) RAY, SWEETIE IRIE, DILLIE AND GENERAL LEVY CHILL AT THE STINGRAY HEADQUARTERS

so a little reminder of what's good is essential to make the struggle you go through worthwhile.

Ideally, in a perfect world, I wouldn't have to work late nights that often carry over into the middle

With the exception of my other engineers, Paul Brown and Jermaine Jah-Son Ford, the studio is always rife with visitors floating in and out. Be it at the hands of artists who have come in to use our equipment

altogether or have gone onto better jobs. All I do know is that I can count the English acts who record with us now on one hand.

Despite the recent decline in sales, I have made a decision to keep struggling on. Why? Because I'm not engrossed in the financial side of things. Sure it would be great if I could make lots and lots of money from either my records or my compilation CDs but I struggle on because of the love of it. Music is something that comes from deep within me. The pleasure derived from it is not something that you can explain. Even if there is no money in my pocket, by making a song I'm proud of or that the public like, I get my just reward.

Juggling

Here at Stingray Records we pride ourselves that 98 per cent of our records are made by us from start to finish. As well as juggling the demands of producing a record, we also distribute our own material. On average, anything from a day to a week is taken up with driving from record shop to record shop dropping off and picking up material. Preferably I'd like to trust this responsibility to a distribution company. But as far as I can see, no-one is taking care of the reggae side of

things properly. You're gonna hear that your records didn't sell a certain amount when they did. You're gonna hear that statements have been posted when they haven't. Or worse still, you've got to fight to get your royalties. So our approach is why depend on people when you can do it yourselves.

Our latest album, *Stingray Collection Volume 5*, is still doing really well, even though it was released late last year. It seems that there's a track on there that everyone can relate to, young or old, black or white. Particular favourites are the previously unreleased single *Fill My Cup* by Bushman and Freddy McGregor's *Key To The City*.

Currently we're working on a new compilation, *Stingray Collection Volume 6*, which will be even better than the last one. At the moment we're still adding the essential finishing touches to it so I don't want to give out details such as which artists appear and all that. But what I will tell everyone is that this album's gonna be so wicked it should fly off the shelves. Literally, Stingray is gonna do just that, sting everybody with vibes.

■ The album *Stingray Collection Volume 5* is out now

'Music is something that comes from deep within me. The pleasure derived from it is not something that you can explain'

of the morning. However, nine times out of 10 that is usually the case. Most times the reason is simply because of the schedule of some of the singers I'm working with. Believe it or not, most singers prefer working through the night as they say that though their body may wake up in the morning, their voice doesn't rise until night-time. And it's probably true; on several occasions I've watched a singer come into the studio all hoarse in the throat and then after a little coaxing, spring-board into shape.

or radio deejays keen to get a sneak preview of our latest project.

Luckily, because we work for ourselves we decide which artists we want to voice tracks for us. Admittedly, a lot of the artists who feature on our records are from Jamaica which has caused critics at certain levels to accuse us of selling out. In response all I can say is that there's more to those allegations than meets the eye. If you check it, there's a lot of English artists that no longer record. I don't know if they have given up on the business

Got any news or comments? E-Mail me at: misslickshot@hotmail.com