



FILM BUZZ

by David Katz

Queens of Sound explores the challenges female artists face in the reggae scene • King At The Controls DVD pays tribute to King Jammy, the producer and sound system operator who changed Jamaican popular music with the Sleng Teng rhythm

Reggae sisters

Queens of Sound: a Herstory of Reggae and Dancehall.

A film by Sandra Krampelhuber



The music industry is notoriously unfair to women. Because it is dominated by men, female talent is neglected, and those who break through are often forced to sensationalise themselves to earn a chance at fame. In the world of reggae and dancehall, the situation is particularly acute: although a handful of female singers and deejays have forged successful careers, the production sphere is so exclusively male that it is often called a "fraternity".

Sandra Krampelhuber, a 33-year-old music fan from Austria, decided to redress the balance through film. *Queens of Sound: a Herstory of Reggae and Dancehall* explores the challenges female artists face in the modern reggae scene and their important, if contested, roles within it.

[Charmaine Munroe](#)
[a.k.a. Macka Diamond](#)
Philipp Kroll

"There are already many films about reggae music, but you hardly see any women in them, and I think this has nothing to do with the lower percentage of women in this music business. It has something to do with our perception, because we women got used to always seeing the men speaking," she said.

"Another reason for this project was that dancehall music experienced a big boom all over the world, but little is known about the social background of this music genre, and the outcome of this ignorance is sometimes a very superficial illustration in mainstream media."

Krampelhuber says the largely self-funded film was initiated during postgraduate studies at the University of Vienna. "I studied Social and Cultural Anthropology with a special interest in Caribbean and African Diaspora Studies, and one of my professors, Dr Werner Zips, did extensive research in Jamaica about the Maroons and Rastafari philosophy, and he is also kind of a reggae and dancehall addict. Through his lectures, I got very interested in Jamaican culture, so I wrote my MPhil thesis about Jamaican anansi stories. I was thinking about writing a PhD thesis about women in reggae, but I thought I could reach more people if I made something visual."

The film gets to the heart of the matter through first-hand testimony from dancehall stars such as Macka Diamond, Tanya Stephens, Chevelle Franklyn, Lady G, and upcoming Rasta vocalist Queen Omega, who all speak of the hardships experienced by women in the industry.

Veterans such as Marcia Griffiths proclaim that they succeeded through unwavering principle and personal determination. Provocative statements and good social commentary are provided by revered industry and academic figures, such as lawyer Sandra Joy Alcott, founder of the Jamaican Association of Female Artists (and composer of the song "No Pum-Pum, No Record Deal"), and Dr Carolyn Cooper, Professor of Literary and Cultural Studies at the University of the West Indies, Mona.

"Women are no longer mere objects for male desire; they speak for themselves and reclaim their sexuality through their lyrics, and those songs are an effective weapon when it comes to breaking taboos in Jamaican society," suggests Krampelhuber.

In some ways, the lack of narration and partly disjointed editing leave plenty of unanswered questions. The limited budget and tight production schedule resulted in a few visual peculiarities — some speakers are filmed with their faces partly obscured, or from too far a distance. Nevertheless, this is an important and timely work that expands the knowledge base and highlights the role of women in contemporary reggae.

URL: www.queens-of-sound.com

Sleng Teng man

King Jammy: King At The Controls

Essential Hits From Reggae's Digital Revolution 1985-1989 (VP Records)



Producer and sound system operator King Jammy revolutionised Jamaican popular music in 1985 with the totally digital "Sleng Teng" rhythm, ushering in contemporary dancehall style.

Jammy first established his sound system during the ska era, and was one of the most creative producers of roots reggae during the 1970s. His stable endured some lean years, as rival producers and protégés surged ahead while Jammy spent time abroad. But the King has recently reasserted his ascendancy through notable new work with Sizzla and Michael Rose, and his sound system remains in demand with overseas audiences as well as in his west Kingston home base.

[King Jammy](#)

Courtesy VP Records

Now VP Records' double-disc package *King At The Controls* pays fitting tribute to the man's many achievements through a compilation CD and accompanying documentary DVD.

Much of the music on the CD is computer driven, but there are some notable early productions that Jammy cut live with the High Times Players, such as Half Pint's excellent "Money Man Skank", Johnny Osbourne's massive "Water Pumping", Junior Reid's grooving "Boom Shack-A-Lack", and the remixed version of Black Uhuru's anthem-like "I Love King Selassie".

Among the most memorable of the digital tracks are Pinchers' "Agony", Shabba Ranks' "Peenie Peenie", Frankie Paul's "I Know The Score", Admiral Bailey's lewd "Punnany", and Admiral Tibet's "Serious Time", along with Wayne Smith's immortal "Sleng Teng".

Mostly shot in Jamaica, the high-quality DVD is a real treat for Jammy's fans, as it features interviews with key artists such as Ninjaman, Admiral Bailey, Wayne Smith, Elephant Man, Chakademus and Beenie Man, plus fellow producers Bunny Lee and Black Scorpio, as well as the King himself. Their testimony is augmented by unseen archive footage of sound system clashes from the 1980s (including one incredible scene in which a Jamaican performs "Sleng Teng" on a didgeridoo), and an official Jamaican radio awards ceremony in which Jammy was crowned King for "Sleng Teng".

Jammy's career is documented only from "Sleng Teng" onwards, and the story of "Sleng Teng" itself is somewhat difficult to follow. But this fine package comes highly recommended for anyone interested in the evolution of dancehall music.

David Katz

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