

# **Narrative for Reggae Sunsplash**

## **Analog Audio-Visual Recordings (1978 – 1994)**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Reggae Sunsplash, considered as the godfather of all reggae festivals, was first launched in Montego Bay, Jamaica in 1978 by four young entrepreneurs that formed a company called Synergy Productions. The festival was a pioneering event that was done in conjunction with the Jamaica Tourist Board with the aim of attracting tourists during the summer months when the hotels were traditionally closed because of the customary lull in visitor arrivals. Synergy Productions set specific objectives that included showcasing the best reggae artists and using the highest contemporary production standards, creating a summer tourist season that would earn the island of Jamaica critically needed foreign exchange while providing employment to the artistes, the many people involved in the tourist trade and the art and craft industry, as well as the concessionaires, farmers and street vendors. The organizers hailed the 7-night festival that started at dusk and went through the night until dawn, as “Reggae Sunsplash, the biggest reggae festival in the history of the World.”

Synergy Productions achieved its stated objectives within the first 5 years and Reggae Sunsplash became the annual premier tourist attraction in Jamaica. Spurred by the Sunsplash World Tours, the festival attracted traditional tourists from Europe and the USA, as well as non-traditional tourists that came from diverse areas around the world ranging from Japan in the Far East, to Greenland, to South America and visitors arrived from niche areas such as Hopiland and Monaco.

Reggae Sunsplash became the Mecca for reggae artists worldwide and it soon became the industry benchmark and the venue where all reggae artistes aspired to perform. The impact of Reggae Sunsplash was so widespread that it attracted many international record labels seeking to sign new talent. Artistes such as Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Bunny Wailer, Burning Spear, Toots & the Maytals, Jimmy Cliff, Bob Andy, Marcia Griffith, Black Uhuru and Culture laid a solid foundation

along with Sunsplash regulars like Ziggy Marley, Dennis Brown, Yellowman, Gregory Issacs, Third World, Steel Pulse, Shabba Ranks, Cobra, Patra, Shaggy, Buju Banton, Garnet Silk and many more.

## **CURRENT STATUS**

Due to the impact of Reggae Sunsplash there are now more than 250 annual reggae festivals worldwide that have provided employment opportunities for reggae artistes. The current situation now is that a lot of this significant and valuable part of the history of reggae music is at risk because of deteriorating quality over the years.

Ironically, the music has experienced several changes and stages from Ska, to Reggae, to Rock Steady, to Lover's Rock, to Dancehall the music keeps evolving and its impact on international music is now at a very high level. Current artistes such as Drake, Rhianna, Justin Bieber, Nicki Minaj and Sia have all collaborated with Jamaican Dancehall artistes and have enjoyed number 1 or within the top 10 hits on the popular Billboard charts.

We propose to properly inventory and catalogue the 250-300 hours of festival footage that is at risk due to deterioration of the analog film, and our first priority is to house the audio-visual materials in a stabilized, climate-controlled environment. Having been responsible for producing Reggae Sunsplash programs for the USA, Canada and Caribbean pay-per-view distribution between 1990 and 1994, Douglas Green, co-researcher on the preservation and dissemination project and co-founder of the Reggae Sunsplash Preservation Society, is deeply familiar with the artistes and can prioritize according to uniqueness and historical significance.

With respect to ownership and rights we have signed artiste contracts and in circumstances where contracts cannot be found, we can secure the rights and have artistes sign new contracts if there is a need because of our positive storied goodwill. Our focus is to ultimately digitize all the audio-visual footage and preserve this very important part of the history. We have identified qualified personnel at St. John's University, including archivists in the Library and Information Sciences department, who have expressed interest in assisting with the preservation effort and we have outlined the planned preservation methodology.