



King Jammy

DANCEHALL ROOTS

As Bush and Blair have discovered, a revolution can't be imposed from above – it has to come from the grass roots. The rise of dancehall music was a revolution from the ghetto roots. Every yard had a sound system, and eventually the sounds they chose would come to rule reggae music worldwide – and influence almost every other type of music.

Each sound system had its own selector (the man who chose the music), operator (the man who did the physical putting on of the records – and the taking off when it came to a rewind), and a posse of DJs (rappers) and singers. These latter could rise through the sound system ranks from street corner to huge soundclash, building a following as they went along. Eventually they'd hit Jamaica's studios, and if they were lucky, the charts.

The reggae business began this way – the first record producers were sound men. In the early 1980s, when reggae needed to return to its roots after the demise of Bob Marley and a series of Jamaican economic setbacks, so a new generation of stars and producers once again emerged from the sound systems. And the man who understood the process best of all, one who was both a sound man and familiar with the workings of the reggae business from the inside, was King Jammy.

Just as Treasure Isle and Studio One had in the '60s, and Channel 1 in the '70s, then surely, King Jammy's studio ruled reggae in the 1980s. His HQ, in the fierce Waterhouse ghetto district of Kingston 11, was a constant source of supply for the greatest in ragga sounds – and still has a major part to play today. With a 20-year history in reggae music, Jammy's emergence as *the* boss producer of the mid-80s was a result of his ears being attuned to all the major developments in Jamaican music and filtering those

through the then-new digital electronic sounds. That's why Jammy's sound was so successful – you can hear all of reggae in it, not just the sound of the moment.

Hence, on tunes like Junior Delgado's scorching 'Illegal Gun', you're catching a piece of the mid-'70s rockers sound in a new context. In Home T's 'Don't Throw It All Away', there's a taste of the stately sounds of rocksteady. And when it came to dancehall business, none could hold down a roughneck riddim like Jammy, as any number of his titles testify.

Lloyd "Jammy" James began his musical life as an electronics wizard in the 1960s and ran his own sound system before leaving for "foreign" at the start of the '70s. On his return to Jamaica in 1976 he stepped into the shoes of dub pioneer King Tubby as engineer at his studio. Then modestly known as Prince Jammy, his brilliance at the mixing board led him, via a string of acclaimed dub albums, to launch his own rootsy label, Jammy's. His productions made stars of Black Uhuru and kept the careers of such luminaries as Yabby U and Hugh Mundell bubbling hot.

By the time Jammy had opened his own studio at 38 St Lucia Road, Kingston 11, in the same ghetto where he had made his name at Tubby's studio, he was already a formidable figure in the music business. His sound system was on the rise again and the Jammy's label helped the nascent dancehall scene grow up with a string of hits from Half Pint, Johnny Osbourne, Sugar Minott, Junior Reid and many more. While other producers like George Phang and Henry "Junjo" Lawes were more than matching Jammy in the popularity stakes, that was all to change in 1985 when the great man unleashed a musical revolution that still resonates in reggae to this day.

There had been Jamaican records featuring drum machines before – Bob Marley, Lee Perry and others had tried them. But when Jammy's unleashed Wayne Smith's 'Under Me Sleng Teng' in February 1985, it blew the old style away. This was not an electronic drum beat used to impersonate a band. It was a complete and powerful thing in itself, unashamed to call itself electronic – or "digital" as the new style would be called. Created on a little Casio keyboard, the unapologetically raw sound was the first tremor from which a ragga earthquake would erupt. From this point on, Jammy would not bother with a band any more – and the rest of reggae would follow his radical lead. But Jammy had two advantages: he had been steeped in the music since the early '60s and his technical brilliance meant he always managed to get the most out of musical machines while others struggled.

Whenever there is a revolution, there is a backlash. Old-style musicians, singers, sound men and lovers of so-called "classic" roots reggae declared this new vibe an abomination. But the stone that the builder refused has proved the cornerstone for everything that has happened in reggae since, the moans washed away by the tidal wave of excitement that Jammy's digital ragga created.

Jammy not only teased great performances out of veteran stars like Johnny Osbourne and Horace Andy, allowing them to feel at ease with the new sound, but did much to establish new talents like Shabba Ranks, Admiral Bailey and Cocoa Tea. Promoted from Prince to King, his sound system, King Jammy's Super Power, became one of the biggest reggae music had ever seen. Jammy was on top of the reggae world.

Part of the success was down to his shrewd ear for talent, which extended to his choice of backroom staff. Engineer Bobby Digital (Robert Dixon, the original Bobby Digital, no relation to the later Wu-Tang variety), created a crisp yet warm Jammy's sound. Mikey Bennett, of the vocal group Home T4, did much of the songwriting and proved an adept arranger in this hitherto unexplored musical field. And Steely & Cleve (Wycliffe Johnson and Cleveland Browne) supplied the skilful musicianship, having previously worked at Studio 1 and Tuff Gong. But the most important factor was that Jammy had been a sound man for years and extra years – an intimate knowledge of dancehall was in his blood.

As anyone buying reggae music back then could testify, Jammy's formula was a runaway success. Reggae shops took weekly shipments of Jammy's music on his distinctive blue label – some 10 singles a week at some points – and still couldn't get enough. Jammy's albums, chiefly issued on his own label and a series of imprints owned by Count Shelly's World Enterprise company, ruled the reggae charts. It was the Studio One of its era, creating magnificent digital rocksteady or tough sound boy ragga that still rocks today on revival repress 45s. At the heart of it was the genial figure of Jammy himself, sharp little moustache, gentle smile and casually open body language belying the toughness required to graduate from reggae's school of hard knocks.

By the late '80s, Jammy's team had begun to split up. Bobby Digital, Steely & Cleve and Mikey Bennett all left to start their own labels although none quite matched the dominance of their former employer. Jammy, meanwhile, simply carried on, his company begetting his brother Trevor's Uncle T label, and his son founding the John John label. It wasn't so much a business as a dynasty. When roots music came back into fashion, to be followed by bashment, Jammy was equipped for both. His hitmaking skills still flourish today, although arguably the second half of the '80s and the start of the '90s, the era covered by this collection, remains Jammy's golden period.

So rewind to that time and hear once again the sound that created the regga revolution. It was a time when the sound booted and a gunman lyric could shock the world – yet these tunes mostly sound pretty innocent compared to the horrors of today. These Jammy's classics will still rock you and, in every note, will tell you why Jammy is the King.

Ian McCann

CD 1

1. Wayne Smith - Under Me Sleng Teng
(Davey / James / Smith) Greensleeves Publishing Ltd. © 1985 Jammy's Records. Produced by King Jammy. Arranged by King Jammy and Steely & Cleve.

The tune that started the entire digital era. Said to have been created on a little Casio keyboard by singer Noel Bailey with Wayne Smith in attendance to supply the lyric, or alternatively, to have been found as a demo rhythm on the same model of keyboard by Tony Asher and then voiced by Wayne. Either way, the tune was brought to Jammy who then unleashed version after version of it with different vocals. How did Jammy know it was a hit? By testing it on his sound in a dance at the start of 1985.

2. Tenor Saw - Pumpkin Belly
(Bright / James) Greensleeves Publishing Ltd. © Jammy's Records. Produced & Arranged by King Jammy.

Best known for 'Ring The Alarm', here's another dancehall classic worthy of similar status from the late Clive Bright, aka Tenor Saw, riding 'Sleng Teng' again.

3. Admiral Bailey - Big Belly Man
(Admiral Bailey) Greensleeves Publishing Ltd. © 1987 World Enterprise Records. Produced by King Jammy.

For a short period of 1987/88 it became apparent that reggae had three DJs who all looked like they might break globally: Shabba Ranks, Ninjaman and Admiral Bailey. Bailey, every inch a showman, was Jammy's most favoured DJ of the era and cut a string of killers for the label. Eventually Shabba won the battle and Bailey remained true to the dancehall while Ninjaman's wildness was too powerful for the pop market.

4. Admiral Bailey - Kater For Woman
(Admiral Bailey) Copyright Control. © 1987 Jammy's Records. Produced by King Jammy. Arranged by King Jammy and Steely & Cleve.

Some 1987 advice for budding rivals from the ever-friendly, admirable Admiral.

5. Major Mackerel & Colin Roach - Duppy
(Adapted) Copyright Control. © 1988 Jammy's Records. Produced by King Jammy. Arranged by King Jammy and Steely & Cleve.

Major Mackerel had an all-too brief period of stardom in Jamaican dancehall; this duet with another talent who spent too little time at the top, Colin Roach, was one of several gag-filled 1988 regga hits on the subject of duppies – ghosts or evil spirits!

6. Daddy Lizard - No Dibby Dibby
(Daddy Lizard) Copyright Control. © 1987 Jammy's Records. Produced by King Jammy. Arranged by King Jammy and Steely & Cleve.

The Dibby Dibby craze of 1987 mocked wannabes. You could be a Dibby Dibby DJ, a Dibby Dibby woman, a Dibby Dibby sound boy – if you were unlucky. Daddy Lizard was yet another chatting talent who had the vibes for a while without ever quite getting his due.

7. Papa San - Watch Watch
(Papa San) Copyright Control. © 1989 Jammy's Records. Produced by King Jammy. Arranged by King Jammy and Steely & Cleve.

One of the regga era's most amusing lyricists, Papa San could knock out a slyly humorous or rude tune with ease, cutting classics with

Winston Riley, London's Fashion records and Philip "Fatis" Burrell, as well as Jammy's. 'Watch Watch', from 1989, is maybe his finest recording for Jammy – listen to that bristling drum line.

8. Nitty Gritty - Hog In A Me Minty
(Holness) Greensleeves Publishing Ltd. © 1985 Jammy's Records. Produced & Arranged by King Jammy.

Glen Holness, aka Nitty Gritty, was just 33 when he was shot dead in New York in 1991. One of the brightest stars of the mid-80s Jammy's stable, Nitty Gritty took a Jamaican folk saying and made it into one of the biggest rags hits of 1985.

9. Johnny Osbourne - Fire Fire
(Osbourne) Copyright Control. © 1986 World Enterprise Records. Produced by King Jammy. Arranged by King Jammy and Steely & Cleve.

A star in reggae's previous generation, Johnny Osbourne was recording with the Sensations for Winston Riley in the early '70s and consistently cut killers for Studio One during that decade. Unlike many singers of his era, Osbourne was immediately comfortable with dancehall rhythms, as this powerful 1986 outing makes clear.

10. Bobby Digital & Cocoa Tea - Come Home
(Dixon / Scott) Copyright Control. © 1988 Jammy's Records. Produced by King Jammy. Arranged by King Jammy and Steely & Cleve.

The story goes that Cocoa Tea, Jammy's dreadlocks singer of choice, was voicing this tune in the Autumn of 1988 and waiting for a particular DJ to arrive at the session. The DJ never showed, so engineer Bobby Digital took the mic in the studio for the first time and rocked the place. The result was a unique slice of reggae history.

11. Admiral Tibbett - Hang Them
(Admiral Tibbett) Copyright Control. © 1989 World Enterprise Records. Produced & Arranged by King Jammy.

Admiral Tibbett, aka Kenneth Allen, gets rough. The sweet-voiced vocalist usually gave his songs a rootsy vibe, but he came out of the dancehalls as this 1989 soundclash lyric makes clear. Nice use of the 'Real Rock' bassline too.

12. Shabba Ranking - Get Up Stand Up And Rock
(Gordon / Brown / Johnson) Greensleeves Publishing Ltd / EMI Music Publishing Ltd. © 1987 Jammy's Records. Produced by King Jammy. Arranged by King Jammy and Steely & Cleve.

One of the keynote recordings in the rise of Rexton Gordon, aka Co-Pilot, aka Shabba Ranking, Shabba, who made his first recording in the '70s as a roots DJ, was rapidly heading upwards at the time this little cracker was released in 1987. However, Shabba was not Jammy's main DJ back then and flourished further when both he and Bobby Digital moved their considerable talents elsewhere.

13. Ninjaman - From Mi Hold Him
(Ninjaman) Copyright Control. © 1991 Jammy's Records. Produced & Arranged by King Jammy.

The Don Gorgon of dancehall DJs, Ninja (Desmond Ballentine) was the absolute tuffest for a time, giving it his all on any number of riddims and subjects, whether in combination with a singer or flying solo as on this 1991 attack on a particular rival, 'From Mi Hold Him'. He was among the first to completely ignore the rhythmic style of chatting and instead just held forth in his own tempo over a backing tune – a style that surely influenced US rappers galore. The original gunman lyricist later renounced bad boy talk and delivered purely Christian lyrics – and retained his loyal audience.

14. Home T - Don't Throw It All Away
(Adapted) Copyright Control. © 1988 Jammy's Records. Produced by King Jammy. Arranged by King Jammy and Steely & Cleve.

Mikey Bennett stops writing and arranging for a moment in 1988 to knock out this wonderful churning gem with his vocal group. The rhythm is one of Jammy's complete classics and also supported maybe a dozen other cuts.

15. Red Dragon - Do The Della Skank
(Red Dragon) Madin Music. © 1987 World Enterprise Records. Produced & Arranged by King Jammy.

The Della was a dance craze in Jamaica for a few short months in 1987 and this angle on it was delivered by Red Dragon, chatting star of the Stone Love sound system and brother of friendly rival Flogoon.

16. Chaka Demus - Original Kuff
(Chaka Demus) Copyright Control. © 1987 World Enterprise Records. Produced & Arranged by King Jammy.

Like so many of his rivals, Chaka, another of those vying for the crown of Jamaica's ruling rapper, had to wait for the combination style (being teamed with a singer, in this case Pliers) to bite before he reached a commercial peak. However, as a solo star, he was certainly huge in JA, and this 1987 dissertation on the Kuff (ie, a punch) craze sold strongly.

17. Red Dragon - Duck Dance
(Red Dragon) Madin Music. © 1988 World Enterprise Records. Produced & Arranged by King Jammy.

Mr. Dragon breathes fire into another dance craze in the late '80s pre-boogie era. There was an entire album of this one.

18. Pinchers - Agony
(Brown / Johnson / Thompson) Greensleeves Publishing Ltd / EMI Music Publishing Ltd. © 1986 Jammy's Records. Produced & Arranged by King Jammy.

Jammy's launched, or had a big part in, so many of the fads that flew through dancehall. The 1986 'Agony' lyric was Pinchers' (the brother of Pliers – detecting a theme here?) biggest track for Jammy's in the '80s.

19. Cocoa Tea, Home T & Shabba Ranks - Who She Love
(Gordon / Bennett / Scott / James) Greensleeves Publishing Ltd. © 1988 World Enterprise Records. Produced & Arranged by King Jammy.

While other combination records had existed going way back into the '70s, this record, pitting a singer (Cocoa Tea), a vocal group (Home T) and a DJ (you know who) bust the craze wide open. A piece of musical perfection, with bits of an old tune meeting the new lysterly and all three parties battling over one utterly desirable dancehall diva. Why this was not a pop hit in 1988 is just unfathomable.



Tenor Saw

1. Echo Minott - What The Hell

(Echo Minott) Creole Music Ltd. © 1986 World Enterprise Records. Produced by King Jammy. Arranged by King Jammy and Steely & Cleve.

The What The Hell phenomenon in 1986 was one of the early indicators that the new roughneck sound was here to stay. Echo Minott was one of several youths who owed a stylistic, or at least aspirational allegiance, to the then-huge Sugar Minott.

2. Sister June**- Tell You What Police Can Do**

(Sister June) Copyright Control. © 1986 Jammy\$ Records. Produced by King Jammys. Arranged by King Jammy and Steely & Cleve.

Sister June's eminently sensible but terrifyingly violent reply to Echo Minott's original treatise. Ouch!

3. Junior Demus - Miss Monteith

(Junior Demus) Copyright Control. © 1989 Uncle "T". Produced by T. James.

Although by his name you might assume the young Mr. Demus to have simply appeared in the slipstream of Chaka Demus, and you'd be right, in fact the under-appreciated chatter had a rootsy lyrical style all his own. 'Miss Monteith' cut for the Uncle T label in 1989, is a little gem worthy of Outkast.

4. Junior Tamlins - Behind The Wall

(Tracy Chapman) EMI Songs Ltd. © 1988 Jammy\$ Records. Produced by King Jammys. Arranged by King Jammy and Steely & Cleve.

Just as Tracy Chapman's debut album was a huge hit in pop, so too were her songs in reggae, with 'Behind The Wall' getting a lick-over from several artists, including this 1988 interpretation by a member of the veteran Tamlins vocal group.

5. Charlie Chaplain & Cocoa Tea**- Give Thanks**

(M. Bennett / C. Bennett / C. Scott) Greensleeves Publishing Ltd. © 1986 Jammy\$ Records. Produced by King Jammy. Arranged by King Jammy and Steely & Cleve.

No, not *that* Charlie Chaplin. This one was one of the pioneers of the dancehall scene and, teamed on this post-Hurricane Gilbert outing with the dreadlocked Cocoa Tea, there's no way you could laugh. One of several "rebuild the nation" tunes released within a week of the disaster in September 1988.

6. Major Mackerel & Red Rose**- Rough Tough Jamaica Way**

(Major Mackerel & Red Rose) Copyright Control. © 1988 Jammy\$ Records. Produced by King Jammys. Arranged by King Jammy and Steely & Cleve.

The chatting military fish in combination style with Anthony "Red" Rose, the singer who also worked with Jammy's rival round the corner, King Tubby (see 'Ragga Sessions' SESHDCD218 for his amazing 'Tempo').

7. Major Mackerel - Sorry Fi Botha

(Major Mackerel) Copyright Control. © Jammy\$ Records. Produced by King Jammy. Arranged by King Jammy and Steely & Cleve.

Mackerel in militant mood, sorting out the final defender of apartheid with a lyric straight to PW Botha's head. Ragga was all about guns and shagging? No way. Where have we heard that melody before . . . ?

8. Admiral Tibbett - Poor Freddy

(Admiral Tibbett) Copyright Control. © 1991 Jammy\$ Records. Produced & Arranged by L. James.

One of Admiral Tibbett's poignant observational songs, released by Jammy in 1991. Tibbett had a lot of talent and won a certain amount of added fame when his 'Madman' single was adapted as the theme of the movie 'The Lunatic'. However, he deserved far more success than he achieved.

9. Admiral Bailey - Boom Youth

(Admiral Bailey) Copyright Control. © 1989 Jammy\$ Records. Produced by King Jammys. Arranged by Firehouse Crew.

Bailey turns his attention towards the kids and tells them to abandon their arms in this 1989 rocker.

10. Courtney Melody - Poor People

(C. Melody / M. Bennett) Copyright Control. © World Enterprise Records. Produced & Arranged by King Jammy.

Another cut of the 'Who She Love' rhythm and every bit as strong. Courtney Melody's star blazed briefly across the reggae firmament in the mid-'80s, one of the new youth who took on ragga rhythms with as much energy as the electronics could generate. Working for Techniques, King Tubby and Jammy among others, he fell out of favour as rapidly as he rose – a real shame, as 'Poor People' shows that he had more to offer.



Cocoa Tea & Bobby Digital

11. Hopeton Lindo - Ghetto Tenement Yard

(Hopeton Lindo) Copyright Control. © 1988 Jammy\$ Records. Produced by King Jammy. Arranged by King Jammy and Steely & Cleve.

Hopeton Lindo grew up in a ghetto tenement yard himself and was encouraged by the late Dickie Burton, a rootsman who made one brilliant record ('God Is Watching You') before dying of a mysterious disease that removed the salts from his body. Hopeton too was watching you – his songs invariably placed an aspect of Jamaican life under the magnifying glass. One of the principal background figures in late-'80s ragga, writing big hits for Gregory Isaacs ('Rumours') among others, but his own singing career never took off to the same degree.

12. Cocoa Tea - You Must Unite

(Cocoa Tea) Copyright Control. © 1988 Jammy\$ Records. Produced by King Jammy. Arranged by King Jammy and Steely & Cleve.

Calvin Scott made his first record as a child in the early 1970s. By the time he was grown up he was a star in the ghetto as Cocoa Tea. 'You Must Unite' is just one of a heap of fine tunes he cut for Jammy in 1988.

13. Cocoa Tea - Forward To Africa

(Scott) Greensleeves Publishing Ltd. © World Enterprise Records. Produced & Arranged by King Jammy.

More roots, this time a re-working of Alton Ellis' 'Back To Africa', from the man with a voice that could pour sugar over the most controversial of topics.

14. Junior Delgado - Illegal Gun

(Junior Delgado) Third World Music. © World Enterprise Records. Produced & Arranged by King Jammy.

Junior "Jux" Delgado, one of the perennial roots figures in Jamaican music, had one of his purple patches in the mid-to-late '80s, exemplified by this powerful examination of guns in the ghetto. That keyboard lick at the start is so funky, and Jux's lyric and 110 per cent vocal commitment make it clear that the blame for blood-letting does not entirely rest with the so-called bad boys.

15. Horace Andy - Live And Save Life

(Horace Andy) Rough Trade Music. © World Enterprise Records. Produced & Arranged by King Jammy.

The then ex-Studio One and future Massive Attack legend was one of the first of the older stars to really get to grips with the dancehall style and sounds utterly convincing on this 1988 St. Lucia Road roots rendition, based on Wayne Jarrett's classic 'Youth Man'.

16. Pad Anthony - Musical Sample

(Pad Anthony) Copyright Control. © Uncle "T". Produced by T. James.

One from Jammy's brother label, Uncle T. Pad Anthony hit the scene in 1986, largely through his work at Jammy's, and became a familiar name – maybe too familiar, as his talents were pretty much taken for granted. The militant rocking of 'Musical Sample' hides a serious message.

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